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PRINCESS OF ENGLAND

A ROMANCE OF THE CRUSADES

BY

MME SOPHIE COTTIN
Author of "Elizabeth, or the Exiles of Siberia."

FROM THE FRENCH BY JENNIE W. RAUM

EDITED BY GEORGE E. RAUM

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. 1.

NEW YORK:
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MATILDA

PRINCESS OF ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER a long and bloody siege, the victorious Saracen sultan, Saladin, had just entered Jerusalem.

The report of the fall of the holy city threw all Christendom into a state of the wildest agitation. William, Archbishop of Tyre, immediately after the dire catastrophe embarked for Europe to share his grief with the sovereign pontiff; and to ask of him relief for his brethren in the Orient.

But these fatal tidings were a death-blow to Urban III. He expired in the arms of William.

Gregory VIII. succeeding him, advocated a new Crusade. At his voice of appeal — at that of the pious archbishop, who, cross in hand, traversed Europe, pleading, exhorting, commanding with an eloquence almost superhuman, the spirit of the people was aroused: every soul became inspired with an enthusiastic desire for personal glory, and the advancement of the cause of religion. Unto the very thrones of the

temporal sovereigns penetrated the stirring appeal; and with one accord the crowned heads of Europe uprose, and took oath never to ground arms until they had re-entered that Jerusalem for which the blood of their ancestors had flowed; within whose walls was enshrined the sepulchre of the Saviour; and whose loss was a stain which only its recovery could efface.

At the head of the confederate sovereigns were Richard I. of England, and Philip Augustus of France. Rivals through the extent and situation of their territory, they were still more so by reason of a similarity of age and tastes. Each, proud, haughty, and fearless, was roused by the faintest semblance of affront; each, inspired with an ardent desire for glory, was equally resolute to yield in the contest in no wise to the other. Philip Augustus, great and magnanimous, as well as prescient and wise, aspired to triumphs more profitable than brilliant. Richard, loyal to honor, but fiery and imprudent; as powerless to dissimulate a sense of wrong, as to allow a day to close upon it unavenged; as constant in his affections as in his dislikes, and inspired, withal, with a courage which recognized no obstacles to its daring, Richard perhaps surrounded his name and exploits with a more brilliant renown than did his rival, and owed to the very excess of these qualities the universal admiration in which he was held, and the conspicuous misfortunes to which the snares of the wily subsequently consigned him.

The Emperor Frederick, at the head of fifty thousand men, had just departed for Palestine; while Richard

and Philip Augustus, still encamped upon the plains of Gisors, beheld their armies each day increased by the pathetic and impassioned appeals of William of Tyre. All the two kingdoms contained of youthful ardor and enthusiasm flocked to the standards of their respective sovereigns; and with proudly swelling hearts, assuming the emblem of meek submission, the Crusaders impatiently awaited time and opportunity for the exercise of their martial aspirations.

Meanwhile the two monarchs separated, appointing rendezvous at Messina. Philip embarked at Genoa; Richard returned to London to place the regency in the hands of his brother John; while Berengaria, his promised bride, had already gone to await his arrival in Sicily, where their nuptial bonds were to be celebrated.

Richard's betrothed wife was the daughter of Don Sancho of Navarre. Berengaria possessed few accomplishments or personal attractions; but such rare virtues adorned her character, and so fervent was her devotion to Richard, that she had succeeded in ensnaring the heart of that great monarch. He had chosen this modest flower from among the many brilliant dames whose smiles of encouragement responded but too eagerly to his admiring glances. He had preferred her even before the sister of Philip Augustus. In vain the haughty Alixe had endeavored to retain him at her side. Dazzled for a brief space by her rare personal charms, Richard had quickly discerned the absence of those moral attributes which alone possessed the power to

enthrall him: and for once modest merit triumphed over the advantages of beauty and a more exalted rank.

But, ere engaging in a long and perilous enterprise, Richard desired to participate in one of the most solemn ceremonials of the Church.

His youngest sister, the Princess Matilda, was on the eve of assuming the veil. Since her earliest childhood he had never beheld her; nor should he, in all probability, ever see her again; and now, ere she be lost forever to the world; or he himself fall, perchance, by the hand of the infidel, he desired to know and embrace her — to bid her a last farewell.

While his captains were completing preparations for departure to the seat of war, Richard, accompanied only by the Archbishop of Tyre, who desired to officiate at the solemn ceremony, and by his personal attendants, repaired to the convent, where, but a few months after her birth, his sister had been placed, and where she was about to assume vows to remain forever.

Living for sixteen years in the seclusion of her cloister; surrounded by vestals chaste and pure as herself, the aspirations of the young princess had never wandered beyond the precincts of her retreat, nor her desires towards other than its pious pleasures. In her perfect innocence she ignored the existence of evil as well as the merit of virtue: and thus sped by, scarce noted, the uniform tenor of her young life.

Setting small store by the prestige of her exalted birth: still less vain of a beauty of which, indeed, she

was almost unconscious; with but a confused conception of that great outer world, whose sounds never penetrated her peaceful cloister, and of which the abbess had sometimes spoken as a region infested with danger and temptation, Matilda had each day thanked God for having called her to a holier life; and unconscious of the existence of other happiness than that which her asylum afforded her, she anticipated with eager joy the hour of the solemn ceremony which should bind her to it forever.

The arrival of Richard created no little commotion in the convent. Doors flew open, gratings were unclosed at his approach. For the first time the gaze of man penetrated these consecrated walls: for the first time the sound of arms awoke the echoes of this peaceful roof. The archbishop, preceding the king, announced his visit to the abbess and her timid flock; and Matilda, blushing with the first pleasure she had ever experienced unconnected with her holy vocation, advanced to receive and welcome her brother.

The abbess, followed by her nuns, accompanied the young novice to the convent parlor. They witnessed her meeting with Richard; they beheld evidence of a joy which, springing from worldly ties, was still pleasing in the sight of God.

The king spoke of his aims and plans for the furtherance of the cause of religion — of the long and perilous journey before him. William, with an eloquence which held his hearers enthralled, described the downfall of the holy city; the sufferings and mischances the faithful

must now experience in endeavoring to gain access to places of sacred association; the triumphant joy of those who, overcoming all obstacles, succeeded in reaching the goal of their endeavor.

His words awakened a new ambition in the heart of the young princess; her tender piety assumed a more enthusiastic character: and although surprised and somewhat alarmed on discovering within herself, for the first time, a desire for change, she timidly avowed her wish to assume the cross, and to accompany her brother on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land ere drawing the curtain of seclusion between herself and the outer world forever.

Matilda met with no opposition to her newly-formed desire. A pilgrimage in those days was regarded as the sacrifice most acceptable to God, and the most salutary preparation possible for a monastic life. The young companions of the princess applauded her project, envying her her high privilege, as far as envy could find place in their pious hearts. Over the immaculate whiteness of her novice's habit, the abbess herself fastened the emblematic token of her faith. Then leading her to the king, she placed the young girl's hand in his.

"Your majesty does not yet know the full value of the charge I commit into your keeping," she said, vainly trying to control her emotion; "nor the treasures of innocence and piety the heart of this young maiden incloses. May an unflinching courage defend and shield this young life, Sire. But to you, Reverend Father," she

added, turning to the archbishop, "to you I commend more particularly the guidance of a spirit unsullied by taint of worldly knowledge. It is not the princess of England I confide to your care, but the promised bride of Christ — keep her worthy of so exalted a title! And now, my child, one last word of counsel. Suffer not your heart to be swollen with pride because of your exalted privilege. May a meek and lowly diffidence ever surround you. Remember that no position, however elevated, no nature, however saintly, is beyond the reach of temptation. Lend no ear to the syren voices which flatter but to betray; and may you listen so attentively to the whisperings of the holy spirit within you, that you hear not the beguiling voices of the world."

While Matilda listened with reverential attention to the discourse of the pious abbess, Richard awaited its termination with ill-concealed impatience. No sooner was he at liberty to speak, than he made bold to assure the abbess that his sister had naught to fear while under his protection.

"With the aid of God and my trusty sword," he cried, with knightly enthusiasm, "rest assured, Madam, Matilda will not be less safe in the midst of my camp than within the walls of this cloister."

He gave the signal for departure and, saluting the abbess and her nuns, led the way toward the outer door, followed by his sister and the archbishop.

For the first time in her life Matilda was about to pass that threshold. She paused, hesitated; she seemed

to question within herself whether it were not temerity rather than courage which impelled her to an undertaking so surrounded by unknown dangers. The abbess, beholding her alarm, viewing the abyss of the great world ready to engulf this tenderest lamb of her flock, conceived fresh anxieties. One sacrifice it was yet hers to make; the welfare of this young girl was dearer to her than even her most valued earthly possession. She drew from her bosom where for long years it had lain, a small reliquary, and attached the thin chain from which it hung about Matilda's neck.

"This, my child," she said, "will guard you against all dangers. If storms overtake you; if, more terrible still, evil passions menace you, press to your heart this relic of the true Cross, and you will be saved. Oh, Matilda, you anticipate but holy joys and triumphs: forget not that you are in the world!"

The princess, grateful for so precious a gift, and full of faith in its efficacy, concealed the reliquary in her bosom, kissed the revered hand which had so richly endowed her, and with a last farewell to her sisters, quitted the monastery which so long had given her shelter.

Shuddering as its doors closed upon her she rejoined her brother, who with some impatience awaited her. As they wended their way, the convent walls gradually fading away from the range of sight, the timid spirit of the young novice became more and more troubled. Her agitation increased as she beheld afar the immensity of the horizon unfold before her. Bewil-

dered and anxious, she inquired of her brother the distance which separated them from the Holy City.

Richard smiled at the simplicity of her interrogations.

"Many days — many months, perhaps, must elapse, sweet sister," he said, "ere we reach the land we seek. But what fear you, Matilda," he added, lightly touching the hilt of his sword. "Have I not already assured you that this trusty weapon will be always ready for your defence?"

"And do you forget," interposed the archbishop, pointing heavenward, "One far more powerful, whose mercy is without measure — whose presence encompasses you always?"

We will not pause to depict the various and conflicting emotions of Matilda during the long and tedious voyage. One may to some extent fancy the effect of the grand wastes of ocean, the martial songs of the soldiers, the strange cries of the mariners, the novel surroundings, on a timid girl who until now had known but the peaceful precincts of the cloister, whose ears had never harkened to other notes than the sweet and solemn voices of the nuns uniting in songs of praise to God.

At Messina Richard presented his sister to his betrothed bride. From the first hour of meeting, a close bond of sympathy and affection united the two royal maidens. Matilda seemed to find again, in her brother's betrothed, the modest graces so associated with the companions of her young life; and the daughter of Sanchez lavished affection from the fountain of an

overflowing heart, upon the sister of him to whom the closest of all earthly ties was so soon to unite her.

CHAPTER II.

THE differences which intervened between Richard and Philip Augustus, differences which the unprincipled conduct of Tancred, King of Sicily, to some extent inaugurated, prevented the execution of the English monarch's intention to celebrate his nuptials with Berengaria at Messina; and it was only after the conquest of Cyprus that he was at liberty to order preparations suitable to the celebration of so great an event.

Never were nuptials consummated under more favorable auspices, nor surrounded by a greater degree of magnificence and *éclat*.

Victorious over Isaac, King of Cyprus, Richard reigned in his stead; compensated for the obstacles which had prevented him from sooner sharing his throne with Berengaria, by the pleasure he experienced in placing an additional crown upon her head.

At the tidings of his success Richard was quickly rejoined by Guy de Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, a young and haughty sovereign, whose marvellous courage had still been unsuccessful in defending his throne; and who, a refugee from his own territory, found his title to it disputed by Conrad, Marquis of Montferrat.

In hopes of one day reclaiming his crown from the

hands of the infidel, Guy de Lusignan came to implore aid from Richard against the pretensions of his rival. This step had become all the more urgent because Philip Augustus upon his arrival in Syria had already declared against him and sustained, with all his powerful influence, the claims of Conrad, who, master of Tyre — the sole city at present in actual possession of the Christians in Syria — had closed its gates upon Lusignan, and raised against him the standard of revolt.

Since his sojourn in Sicily, Richard had experienced an increasing dislike towards Philip Augustus. Influenced by a spirit of jealousy of a renown which equalled his own, he readily availed himself of the opportunity offered to place himself at the head of a party opposed to the King of France. Sensible, besides, of the extent of the confidence reposed in him by Lusignan, flattered by his appeal, touched by his misfortunes, he took oath to protect him against his opponents: and from that moment, bound to each other by the double bonds of benefactions and gratitude, they vowed a mutual friendship and brotherhood-in-arms for life.

Raymond, Prince of Antioch; Bohemond, Prince of Tripoli; Renaud, Prince of Sidon; Honfroi de Thoron; and Leonard, Prince of Armenia, had accompanied Lusignan to Cyprus. In adding their voices to that of their king, they came also to ask protection for themselves. The English king promised to support them all in their several claims, and never to leave Syria until he had rëinstated them in their territory. In return for so important a service, these princes, and even

Lusignan himself, offered to regard Richard as their suzeraine, and to pay him duties of vassalage. But magnanimous Richard refused an honor which would almost have equalled the benefits he sought to confer; and all that he exacted of their gratitude was that they should remain with him to grace with their presence the festivities attendant upon his nuptials.

The day set for the celebration of the marriage of Richard of England to Berengaria of Navarre, was ushered in at early dawn by the music of a thousand instruments. The fine church of St. James was decorated with regal magnificence. The streets were hung with garlands of flowers, and carpeted with costly fabrics. Lusignan opened the procession at the head of his tributary princes: upon his flowing mantle, thrice dipped in Tyrian purple, blazed in rich embroidery the fires of the Oriental sapphire. Further on gleamed the steel and gold armor of the mailed knights of England. In their midst, was Richard with crown and sceptre and all the brave paraphernalia of his high estate, and Berengaria beside him — Berengaria whose lips were about to pronounce vows her pure heart had long since registered on high — Berengaria, whom modesty and happiness rendered almost beautiful to-day.

That naught should be lacking to the joyousness of the occasion, the daughter of Don Sancho had requested that Matilda should participate in the ceremonies of the day: Richard, more arbitrary, had exacted her consent. The young novice, enveloped in her long and ample veil entered the church with Berengaria's suite and be-

ld for the first time nuptial rejoicings and worldly easures, in their most seductive aspect. Vows of ernal love addressed to mortal instead of to God, stonished her innocence; and the passionate fervor of ichard, the shy tenderness the young bride could not together repress, ruffled the calm serenity of her pure art.

Guy de Lusignan, seated near the King of England, as the only one of the assembled princes able to dis- over glimpses of the charms Matilda's novice's garb en- hrouded; and he was inspired with a passion as violent s it was sudden.

But the thought of Sibyl, his wife, and the religious abit of the young novice, presenting to him obstacles nsurmountable to even his daring, he confined to his own reast a sentiment from which he was never to recover.

Richard, to whom martial glory was more congenial han love-making, having devoted but a few days to his bride, was already growing restive under his peaceful surroundings; and he hastened forward preparations for embarking for Palestine. But having learned from Lusignan that the sea was thronged with Saracen ves- sels, that the coasts of Syria, and even those of Egypt, were infested with their foes; and that Malek Adhel, brother of Saladin, and the most formidable warrior in Asia, frequently took part in their cruises, Richard re- fused to allow Berengaria and Matilda to share the perils which would probably environ him. His heroic heart throbbed with impatience to meet the infidel in fair and open conflict; but in order to nerve his arm to

its fullest strength and daring, those most dear to him must be secure from danger. Confident that once in Ptolemaïs, the infidels, furious at having missed their prey, would direct all their efforts towards himself, thus leaving the sea unsentineled, Richard believed the voyage would then be a comparatively safe one for his wife and sister; and he accordingly issued orders that the vessel prepared for the accommodation of his family and suite should not set sail until after the entrance of his own into the port of Ptolemaïs.

Matilda, habituated to yielding implicit obedience, submitted without hesitation to the will of her brother; but Berengaria, in despair at the thought of separation from her beloved, threw herself bathed in tears at his feet, imploring him as the highest possible proof of his affection, to allow her to share the dangers to which he was about to expose himself.

Touched by her grief, Richard yet remained inexorable. He represented to her that the presence of his loved ones, by awakening anxiety, would affect a courage which hitherto had known no fear; and might, perhaps, tempt him to avoid an encounter it was his duty to seek.

The young queen would still have insisted, but Richard, whose will none had ever presumed to oppose, surprised at the persistence of his gentle bride, with some degree of asperity commanded her obedience; and Berengaria, overcome with the dread of displeasing her husband and convinced of the futility of her prayers, kept silence.

The King of Jerusalem, with the other princes of his suite, embarked with Richard. Remaining with the queen were the Dukes of Northumberland and of Gloucester, Simon de Montfort, Count of Leicester, and some French noblemen, among whom were conspicuous the valiant grand chamberlain Adam de Turenne, Enguerrand de Fiennes, and Josselyn de Montmorency; the last, handsome and intrepid as Renaud, had but recently attained manhood, but long been a hero; his exploits had shed a new lustre upon the annals of his country, and fresh laurels seemed awaiting a name which, born with its monarchy, was already more ancient than that of its kings.

Richard also desired that the Archbishop of Tyre should remain with the princesses. "They need, Father," he had said, regarding his queen with something of reproach, "that you should teach them that women must serve God by their patience and submission, as we do by our courage and our strength."

Favored by propitious winds, the vessel of the king was nearing the coast of Asia, when it was suddenly attacked by two galleys of the enemy, manned each by eight hundred men.

Richard's warlike spirit was aroused: far from seeking to avoid the foe, the king awaited their coming. With equal valor on either side, the battle progressed, victory hovering uncertain between Christian and Mussulman.

At length, after a long and hard-fought engagement, in which Richard was valiantly seconded by

Lusignan, the Crusaders succeeded in sinking one of the galleys and capturing the other; and pursuing the remainder of the voyage without molestation, dropped anchor the following day, June 8th, before Ptolemaïs.

On his arrival in that city, Lusignan learned of the death of Sibyl, his wife. This loss, while removing a weighty obstacle to the fulfilment of the ambitious hopes he had dared to form upon beholding the Princess Matilda, threatened, at the same time, his interests in another quarter. Sibyl, daughter of Baudouin, and heiress of the kingdom of Jerusalem, in espousing Lusignan had caused him to be crowned king: but at her death her claim reverted to her sister Isabel, wife of the Marquis of Montferrat, thus giving additional strength to the latter's pretensions. Lusignan, countenanced by Richard, insisted that the title and estate of the crown was irrevertible, and could not be wrested from him. On his side were the Pisans, the Flemish, and the knights of St. John. But the Templars, the Genoese, and the Germans, controlled by Philip Augustus, sustained the claims of the Marquis of Montferrat. Conrad, elated at possessing Tyre while Lusignan was a king without crown or territory, derided his unfortunate rival; while Lusignan returned him full measure of hatred and scorn. While these contestants for a throne—possession of which neither had been able to retain, brought dissension and disunion into the camp of the Crusaders, Saladin secured the crown he had won, more securely upon his own brows: taking every precaution to strengthen the fortifications of Jerusalem,

and to render it impregnable to future attacks of the Christians.

Richard's camp lay toward the sea. He had selected this position to be better able to watch the movements of the besieged and to prevent their receiving succor by land or by water. To the east of the city, opposite the strongest of the towers, called the "Accursed," floated the royal banners of Philip Augustus. In the centre of the encampment were unfurled the glorious eagles of Germany. The three nations were distinguished by the color of the cross that shone conspicuous upon their standards: that of France was red as blood; that of the Germans white; of the English, green.

Among the several European courts assembled upon these distant shores of Asia, that of England strove to eclipse the others in its pomp and magnificence. While Richard loved to surround himself with luxurious appointments and festive scenes, Philip Augustus, more simple and modest in his tastes, leaned solely upon the staff of great and valiant noblemen gathered about him: — such men as the counts of Dreux and of Chartres, Errard and André de Brienne, the Joinvilles, Chatillons, Coucys, and others, whose names are immortal in the annals of France.

But Richard was not one to be long content in a state of inglorious ease. He insisted upon a more vigorous siege of Ptolemaïs, whose surrender would open the way toward the recapture of Jerusalem. But the arrogant Conrad refused to leave his stronghold and

repair to the aid of the Crusaders unless they should previously assure him the crown of Jerusalem. Philip Augustus, also, faithful to his promise to Conrad; discontented, moreover, with the supremacy which Richard seemed to affect toward the confederate armies; jealous, too, perhaps, of the laurels his rival had culled in Cyprus, remained inactive; or contented himself with occasional brilliant but unprofitable skirmishes with the enemy, while avoiding a general assault.

Richard, too faithful and loyal to forsake the cause of his brother-in-arms, and at the same time too proud and self-willed to dream of compromise with his rival, instead of seeking to reason with Philip Augustus, embittered him still more by his taunts and insinuations, thereby adding to the dissensions which divided the army and brooded over the councils.

While their chiefs thus hurled insults at each other, the men who had made such sacrifices in order to rescue Jerusalem from the power of the infidel, murmured loudly at these internecine quarrels which prevented the accomplishment of their mission.

But these fatal dissensions were not the sole cause of the daily increasing anxiety which harassed Richard. Upon reaching Palestine, his first care had been to dispatch orders for the immediate departure of the princesses and their suite from Cyprus. Confident of the joyful alacrity with which such orders would be obeyed, he awaited their coming — and waited in vain. Day after day he repaired to the sea-shore, looking far out over the waters with straining gaze; but if a

distant sail greeted his expectant vision, disappointment surely followed in its wake.

Lusignan never left him: Lusignan shared his hopes, his fears. Since the death of Sibyl, the possibilities which that event opened to him had increased the passion which the King of Jerusalem had conceived for the princess of England — a passion which the friendship of Richard encouraged. Upon the King of England then depended, in great measure, the success of his matrimonial, as well as of his ambitious schemes, and Lusignan spared no pains to confirm a partiality so advantageous to his interests. Richard was sensitive to the power of affection; Lusignan offered him a boundless devotion. But Richard was a jealous king — accepting no partial tribute; and his friend, in avowing to him the passion he had conceived, artfully persuaded him that in the alliance to which he aspired, he considered less the charms of the sister, than the strengthening of the tie of affection which already bound him to the brother. Richard, frank and honest-hearted, readily deceived because himself ignorant of deceit, believed him; and his affection for Lusignan increased to such a point that he could scarcely bear to have him out of his sight. They slept beneath the same tent: they sat at one table: together they fought against the infidel; and the booty taken in battle was shared equally between them. In the jousts they wore the same colors, on their shields the same device: and after the occupations of the day — be it in poising a friendly lance in the tournament, or in drawing sword against the Mussul-

man — with one thought they met at eventide upon the beach. Together they would regard the immensity of the waters, the vast stretch of the horizon, and with a profound silence more expressive than words, would give themselves up to anxious thoughts.

CHAPTER III.

SINCE the departure of her lord, Berengaria had passed the greatest portion of her time in weeping and praying. She pictured to herself her beloved husband a prey to the fury of the infidel. In her dreams she beheld him covered with wounds, or a captive in irons: and her waking thoughts confirmed these fevered dreams as presages of ill-omen; for anxiety goes ever hand in hand with love. In vain the Archbishop of Tyre endeavored to calm her anxious heart, while he openly expressed his regret for her want of faith; but while she shed tears of contrition for her fault, she ceased not to weep for her absent husband.

But what neither the exhortations of William nor the example of Matilda could accomplish, was effected, as by magic, by the arrival of Richard's despatches commanding the immediate departure of his queen and her suite. Berengaria felt slight elation for her husband's brilliant victory, she thought only of his safety, of their early reunion; from the depths of despondency she passed, with a sudden transition, to the acme of bliss.

Although gallantry was in those days regarded as a duty and a prerogative of knighthood, and though among the noblemen composing the queen's suite were the most distinguished knights of Europe, yet not one of them, while worshipping at a distance, dared venture to offer more particular vows at the shrine of the saint-like princess. Notwithstanding the loveliness of her person, the charm of her exquisite grace, the languid beauty of her great blue eyes, there was a purity and innocence in her very presence which silenced all thought of earth-born passion. The spontaneous respect her chaste purity inspired shielded her from the aspirations of love, even more than her novice's garb. She rarely appeared before men: but at her approach with her eyes downcast, her white hands, half hidden in the folds of her linen veil, crossed meekly upon her bosom, admiration was lost in reverence — she seemed so akin to the angels.

The queen was too sincerely attached to Matilda not to regret the sacrifice of her young life upon the altar of religion. It was not the solitude, nor yet the austere regulations of a conventual existence, which seemed to her so great a misfortune; but the loveless life to which she would be condemned. More than once she endeavored to tempt the young girl to renounce the vocation she had chosen: but when she would attempt to dazzle her ambition with suggestions of the crowns so many monarchs would be eager to lay at her feet; when, more frequently still, she would urge upon the young maiden the joys of

conjugal union, Matilda would turn from her; confused — not from fear of temptation, but at suggestions so novel and so repugnant to her innocent heart. Then Berengaria, fearing to alarm a delicacy of such extreme sensitiveness, would quickly change her theme: she would dwell eloquently upon the regrets of a loving brother, the sorrow of a devoted mother when called upon to relinquish forever the youngest and dearest lamb of the home-fold: she would urge, too, her own affection, so newly conceived, yet so deeply rooted. By such appeals the young girl was not unmoved; though her resolve remained unchanged. But Berengaria would follow up her advantage. She would gather about her in social converse the most gallant knights of her court; she would make use of all her womanly arts to draw from them the display of such manly accomplishments and graces as would be most attractive in the eyes of a young maiden. But in vain. The world might allure, nature might breathe upon the untroubled spirit of the novice; dreaming only of Heaven, she heard not their syren voices.

After a slow and uneventful journey the vessel containing the royal travellers sighted the coast of Asia. Already the port of Ptolemaïs could be seen in the dim distance: when suddenly the wind, rising with threatening force, baffled every effort of the mariners to reach the land. For hours the vessel, refusing to obey the guiding hand of the pilot or the brawny arms of the oarsmen, tossed helplessly at the mercy of the stormy billows, and finally, the wind veering in a

south-western direction, she was cast upon the sand bars which stretch for some distance along the coast which environs Damietta. In this plight the queen's galley was discovered by the enemy, who, imagining the Christians thus situated would prove an easy prey, instantly fell upon them.

But subjects who fought in defense of the family of their king, knights whose devoir it was to lay down their lives for beauty and religion, were not likely to yield without a struggle even with such fearful odds against them. At the head of the knights, the youngest and the bravest of them all, Josselyn de Montmorency, sword in hand, fought with such daring and determination that already the enemy had begun to falter, when a boat filled with armed men, suddenly issuing from the port of Damietta, changed the fate of the day. At sight of the tall, commanding form standing at its prow, an exultant shout arose from the infidels.

"Malek Adhel!" they cried, "Malek Adhel! Praise be to Allah and his holy Prophet!"

At the magic of that name the Mussulmans renewed their attack with redoubled energy; while Josselyn of Montmorency, resolved to sell his life dearly, threw himself into the thickest of the mélée, blood flowing in his wake, dead and dying forming a rampart around him.

In the queen's pavilion, whither he had gone to reassure the princesses and the ladies of their suite while the knights fought in their defence without, the Archbishop of Tyre heard the exultant cry of the Mus-

sulmans. A look of pale dismay overspread his venerable countenance.

"Humble yourselves with me, my daughters," he said, assuming an attitude of prayer: "pray to Him upon whom alone we must now rely. Malek Adhel is there — Malek Adhel whom no power on earth can resist!"

The trembling women, obeying the voice of William, knelt in prayer. The archbishop uttered a short but eloquent appeal to the throne of Grace for deliverance from the imminent perils which encompassed them. When he had concluded the queen anxiously inquired:

"Who is this terrible Saracen, Father, from whose power even you bid us cease to hope for escape?"

"Malek Adhel," replied William, "is the brother of the Sultan Saladin, the most redoubtable of the enemies of the true faith. I have beheld him, with fire and sword, reducing to ashes our towns and our granaries. But for him Jerusalem would not have fallen; but for him the Crescent had never been flaunted above the temple of Christ."

Even while he was speaking, the rattling of chains and the grounding of arms overhead announced the confirmation of their fears. The venerable prelate hastened to rejoin his brothers, hoping by his intercession with the enemy to mitigate to some extent the ills which threatened them. Long since he had become personally acquainted with Malek Adhel; and he was not unconscious of the influence he had succeeded in gaining over that renowned warrior.

Thus left to themselves, the unfortunate princesses awaited in fear and trembling the fate which a few brief moments' space would unfold. The queen, in despair at an event which must necessarily prolong her separation from her husband, gave unrestrained vent to her grief, calling upon Richard in piteous accents to come to her aid. Matilda, more resigned, or less aware of the character of the perils which awaited them, clasped to her heart the reliquary the abbess had given her, imploring protection from that source to which her pious thoughts ever tended.

Suddenly the door of their chamber flew open, and a number of men, their bronzed and bearded faces and Asiatic garb betokening their nationality, rushed towards the shrinking women. The rude grasp of the foremost among them was already upon the arm of the queen, when, following close in their footsteps, came one whose authority was asserted on the instant. At sight of his frowning mien, his forbidding gesture, the Mussulman soldiers released their prey and retreated towards the door.

"Fear nothing, madam," said he whose rank was thus revealed, addressing the queen in her own language, whose harsher accents were softened to the more musical intonations of his own. "The Queen of England and those whom her exalted rank overshadows, are my prisoners, but can never be my slaves. You shall be conveyed to my palace and there, surrounded by your people, and treated with all honor and courtesy, remain, bound solely by your pledged word, until such

time as my brother Saladin shall have had opportunity to treat with Richard of England for your release."

The young princess shuddered as the Saracen's last words, confirming her fears, disclosed the presence of Malek Adhel, the direst enemy of her faith. She would have retreated from the queen's side, and secluded herself from observation; but Berengaria, anticipating her intention, laid a detaining hand upon her arm, and presented her to the Saracen.

"Prince," she said graciously, "the sister of Richard will lend her voice to that of his wife in acknowledgment of your generous act; accept our royal word that your trust shall not be unfounded."

Approaching the Princess of England, Malek Adhel offered his hand with courtly grace, yet with a manner evidently unaccustomed to denial. But the young novice, coldly inclining her head, recoiled from the contact, and drew her veil more closely around her.

On reaching the deck, whither the Saracen prince had now conducted his prisoners, the clearer light enabled him to better discern the features of the two illustrious women whom the chances of war had thrown into his power. An ardent admirer of female beauty, the Queen of England possessed not sufficient attraction to rivet the gaze of Malek Adhel: from her he turned to the young princess, who had just raised her heavy veil in order to descend more easily into the boat held in readiness to convey the prisoners into the port of Damietta. The harmonious union of dignity and gentleness in her bearing, the modest flushing of her deli-

cate cheek, the mingled purity and intelligence in the expression of her violet eyes, her manner, the severe simplicity of her dress, offered so striking a contrast to the beauties to whom he had heretofore offered homage, that Malek Adhel was overcome with amazement, and inspired with a sentiment hitherto unknown to him. Master of the most celebrated beauties of Asia, his senses had not escaped the snare of their voluptuous charms; but the Christian maiden, as unconscious of her power as she would have been unwilling to exert it, had won and enthralled at a glance a heart whose sudden passion was tempered by a vague sense of reverence hitherto accorded only to objects of religious veneration.

It was already much for a Mussulman to evince courtesy towards a sex which the laws of Mahomet consigned to slavery. Malek Adhel, habituated to uncontrolled indulgence of his every impulse, and unconscious of the barrier which European customs and the sacred garb of the young novice interposed, saw no reason for concealment of his sudden passion. Hastily quitting the queen's side he rejoined Matilda; and ere the young girl had the slightest intimation of his purpose, he had snatched her with rapture to his breast, and borne her to the waiting boat. There, placing her upon a seat, the Saracen threw himself at her feet, and seizing her hand in his own, gazed upon her with ardent eyes.

So sudden had been the daring act that the young novice, overwhelmed with amazement, had been unable

to offer any resistance. For a moment she remained passive, like a bird under the fell charm of a serpent; then she started to her feet. Her indignant eyes were raised for the first time to the Mussulman's face. Until this moment she had imagined an infidel under the most repulsive of forms: instead of the monster she anticipated beholding, she saw a majestic presence, a proud and martial bearing, a countenance illumined by a spirit of manly self-respect and noble purpose. Surprised, bewildered, believing her senses deceived by some demon in beauty's seductive semblance, she threw herself at the feet of the archbishop, who had hastened to her side, and burying her shame-dyed cheeks among the folds of his robes, burst into a flood of passionate tears.

William, aware of Matilda's extreme piety, perceived in her emotion only a sense of humiliation from having suffered contact with an infidel. He raised and comforted her as best he might; then, while sustaining her still with encircling arm, he bent his venerable head to the Saracen prince.

"Malek Adhel," he said sternly, "this maiden whose sensitive modesty you have just offended, belongs not to this world. Placed by birth in close proximity to the throne of England, she has descended from her exalted worldly station to consecrate her life to the service of God through vows of eternal chastity. Man's least touch is to her a profanation: to this day no Christian knight has dared to regard with envious eye this vestal, dedicated unto the Lord. Permit then,

most puissant Prince, that she remain in untroubled seclusion, faithful to her vows, until such time as God appoint, and Saladin and Richard agree upon terms for her release."

The archbishop awaited the reply of Malek Adhel; but the latter, intently regarding the young girl, still demurred. With each passing moment her beauty seemed the more to enthrall his senses. For the first time, perhaps, in all his life, Malek Adhel the conqueror of men, mastered himself. "Priest of Christ," he said, "your words are of such strange import to me, that in order to obtain belief they must be confirmed by the princess herself." Turning toward Matilda, he added: "Can it be true, madam, that you are voluntarily condemned to enshroud in eternal obscurity charms which astonish and ravish men's souls?"

She raised her eyes heavenward without deigning to look at her questioner.

"God in Heaven," she exclaimed fervently: "Thou knowest that my heart's highest ambition is to serve Thee: its chief desire to be forever isolated from the enemies of Thy holy Name!"

"You perceive, illustrious Prince, that I spoke truly," said the archbishop.

"Yes, Father," returned Malek Adhel, coldly; "I behold the effects of a fanaticism which you miscall religion. Our own faith you condemn as impious—barbarous; yet never has it enjoined upon our warriors to go forth and ravage the territory of alien nations; never has it required the imprisoning of a young and

beautiful existence within a living tomb. Nevertheless, the will of the Princess of England shall be respected. She will, in my palace, lead a life in harmony with her habits and desires."

With a courtly inclination of his haughty head, the Saracen prince withdrew, and entering his own craft, preceded his prisoners to Damietta.

Upon landing, the princesses and their ladies in waiting found litters at their disposal. A horse was offered the archbishop; the remainder of the prisoners, with the exception of those whose wounds incapacitated them for the exertion, proceeded on foot. Montmorency, covered with wounds, pale and motionless from loss of blood, was laid upon a stretcher, and transported to the palace of his victorious enemy.

Malek Adhel occupied while at Damietta the ancient palace of the Caliphs. Everything was resplendent with the magnificence of its former owners. Underfoot were costly marbles; on every side rose columns of jasper and granite. Immense gardens and innumerable apartments were devoted to the seraglio. Eunuchs guarded the private entrances, and superbly uniformed sentinels the outer doors.

But the prince had appointed a different abode for his illustrious captives. Although a stranger to European customs, he was sufficiently aware of the proprieties of life to know that princesses would scorn to sojourn with slaves; and that a place devoted to voluptuous delights would be unsuited to the presence of a Christian high-priest.

The queen, with her sister and suite, and the Archbishop of Tyre, were conducted to a separate palace; and orders were issued, in accordance with the queen's request, that the prisoners should be served by Christian attendants only. Permission was also granted William to perform the offices of the church at will, within the palace; and consent obtained that the noblemen and knights of Berengaria's escort should be allowed to wait upon her at certain hours of the day. Extensive and sequestered grounds surrounded the palace appropriated to the illustrious prisoners; although adjoining those of the seraglio, they were separated by high walls with no apparent means of communication between.

The Oriental luxury of their dwelling surprised even the queen, and was repugnant to the simple tastes of the novice.

Rich Persian carpets smothered the sound of their tread; delicate perfumes, incense and myrrh, exhaled from golden censers, floated on the balmy air. In the main saloon, whither they were first conducted, the floor was inlaid with costly mosaics; and columns of jasper, richly carven, seemed to support a ceiling covered with marvellously executed fresco-painting. In the centre of this vast chamber, surrounded by luxurious divans, four porphyry Cupids poured streams of perfumed waters into a marble basin from whose centre they uprose again in pyramidal spray, cooling the tropical atmosphere, and making sweet music to the ear. Draperies of silken tissue and half-drawn blinds

tempered the too glaring light of day without debarring a view of the bewildering vision of roses and orange-blossoms, myrtle and pomegranate, swinging lazily in the breeze, and shedding their fragrance upon the voluptuous air in the garden beyond.

The most sumptuous apartments of the palace were appropriated to the queen's private use. Matilda selected the most simple; regretting, amid surroundings still too luxurious, the dark and narrow cell where her young life had experienced such quiet, restful happiness.

Shortly after their arrival Malek Adhel despatched to his royal captives slaves laden with baskets of choice fruit and flowers, dainty confections, and refreshing sherbets; but enhancing this evidence of generosity by one of delicate forbearance, he forbore presenting himself in person before the prisoners.

The night following so eventful a day brought little rest to the unfortunate princesses. Berengaria, occupied with thoughts of her absent lord, moistened her solitary pillow with bitter weeping; Matilda, not without tears, indeed, but more resigned to the will of God, endeavored to offer unto Him the sacrifice of an entire submission. In the morning she arose unrefreshed, but strong in her perfect faith, and sought the queen. Ere long the archbishop joined them, and together they knelt before the Omnipresent God, offering tribute of prayer and worship.

This pious duty concluded, the queen, desiring to divert her mind from the repining thoughts which neither her own will nor the wise counsels of the arch-

bishop could repress, questioned the latter concerning such characteristics of the Sultan Saladin as might bear upon their destiny; and of the will and ability of his brother to afford them protection.

"Father," she said, "you, a native of Asia, Patriarch of Tyre for thirty years, counsellor and friend of the Kings of Jerusalem, ambassador more than once to the court of Saladin; you must be better acquainted than most men with the habits and characteristics of our enemy, and can best inform us of the most efficient means to secure our release."

"It is but too true," replied William, "that I have witnessed the birth and growth of Saladin's power — that power which has already succeeded in effecting the downfall of Jerusalem, and which now threatens all Asia. I can, doubtless, inform you of the means through which he attained the exalted position in which we now behold him. His court and its intrigues are thoroughly known to me. I am aware of the virtues which adorn his character, the vices which mar it. I know, too, the marvellous influence which Malek Adhel possesses over him, and the advantages I should have gained for the cause of Christianity, had I been permitted to use my own discretion in treating with that most magnanimous prince. Ah, if instead of the suicidal quarrels which wrought such disastrous consequences to our cause, my counsels had been hearkened to! If Lusignan and Amaury had but trusted to my experience, the Holy Land would never have been reduced to the deplorable state in which we behold it to-day!"

The archbishop sighed, and fell into deep thought.

After awhile, at the queen's entreaty, the archbishop began the promised recital.

CHAPTER IV.

"SALADIN and his brother," began the archbishop, "were brought up in Damascus, at the court of Atabeck Noureddin. Their father Ayoub, who devoted much care to their education, was far from foreseeing or desiring the future greatness destined to his house. Faithful to his king, by whom he was greatly beloved, he occupied himself in conquering new territory for the crown in times of war; or in peace in fulfilling with even-handed justice his public duties as governor of Damascus; thus by example, as well as by precept, he endeavored so to form the characters of his sons that they might become like himself faithful and efficient servants of their sovereign.

"In his childhood Saladin gave no indication of future greatness. He possessed no remarkable traits, and was chiefly distinguished by an easy temper and quiet virtues: while Malek Adhel, full of martial ardor, seemed with his very breath to draw in a love of glory. Saladin, grave, cold, austere, reflected much, spoke little; he disdained frivolities, despised love, and anticipated with regret the arrival of that period in his life, when he should be required by the laws of his country

to bear arms. Malek Adhel, brave, impetuous, frank even to indiscretion, indulging to excess in all the pleasures of youth, obtained by frequent and earnest solicitation permission to shed his blood for his country long ere he had reached the years of earliest manhood. Thus the commanding genius of Saladin remained dormant while constrained to the limits of obedience, while his brother from early youth gave evidence of traits the future was but the more clearly to define. But, different as were the natures of the two brothers, a bond of fraternal affection closely united them. A common respect for the laws of Mahomet, a relentless hatred towards Christianity, mutual interests, and the habit of years, have intensified this affection to such a degree as to challenge our admiration while arousing our liveliest fears.

" In Egypt the brothers received their baptism of fire under command of their uncle Shirkouh who had been sent by Atabeck Noureddin to depose the caliph Fatimite who reigned at Cairo, and to replace his authority with that of the caliph of Bagdad. Shirkouh encountered no obstacles upon his entrance into a state so wretchedly defended, and whose indolent sovereign had relinquished its government into the hands of incompetent inferiors. However, on hearing of the approach of the forces sent by Atabeck, Ledin Allah roused himself from his indolent ease. Possessing no means of defence against so powerful an opponent he essayed the power of bribery, offering to the emissary of Atabeck Noureddin, as price of his treachery, the half

of his treasure and the position of grand vizier, which position would ensure him a power second only to that of the caliph himself.

"Shirkouh was dazzled by the splendor of these offers. His fidelity succumbed to his ambition. He took oath to sustain the rights of Ledin Allah against his master. Malek Adhel when informed of the proposed defection indignantly reproached his uncle, openly accusing him of treachery and the blackest ingratitude. Shirkouh, incensed, would have made use of his power to punish him, but Saladin interposed, interceding in behalf of his brother; and even succeeded in inducing the latter to accompany their uncle and himself to an audience with the caliph.

"The dazzling splendor of the court of Ledin Allah astonished the sons of Ayoub, accustomed as they were to the severe simplicity of that of Noureddin. But they beheld it with widely different emotions. While the base conduct of Shirkouh fired the noble and generous soul of Malek Adhel with indignation, Saladin became conscious of an ambition within him whose very germs he had hitherto ignored. It was not envy of the prospects which had so dazzled Shirkouh that had thus transformed the elder son of Ayoub. His ambitious gaze soared higher, his daring grasp would fain reach to the very reins of absolute power.

"Day by day, these aspirations gained stronger ascendancy over Saladin, till finally he only awaited the opportunity to put them into execution. Shirkouh died suddenly, and Ledin Allah finding his position once more

insecure, hastened to offer to the eldest of the sons of Ayoub the same inducements which had gained Shirkouh to his cause. Saladin, busied with his ambitious schemes, feigned acquiescence in the caliph's plans, excusing his acceptance to Malek Adhel by the assurance that he would make use of the power thus conferred upon him only in the furtherance of the wishes and interests of his sovereign master, Atabeck. Malek Adhel, in the plenitude of his trust, never doubted the integrity of his brother's motives. But while absent from Cairo, engaged in doing battle with the Christians, he learned that Ledin Allah had lost his life, and that Saladin reigned in his stead. He had refused to believe in Saladin's treachery towards his sovereign; still less could he believe in his duplicity toward himself. He hastily quitted the scene of brilliant victories where his name already shone conspicuous, and returned to Cairo. He presented himself before his brother; he represented to him with burning cheek and tear-dimmed eyes the disgrace such usurpation must cast upon their name: he pictured the despair of their aged father; he reminded him that to that master whom he would betray he was indebted for the opportunities which had led to his present power.

"Saladin had not forgotten the benefits of his royal master; he respected the gray hairs of his father, he loved Malek Adhel as never brother had loved brother, and yet, believing with full confidence in the high destiny awaiting him, he refused to yield to Malek Adhel's eloquent appeal. Unwilling to wage war against

his brother, resolved not to defend him against the just anger of Noureddin, yet unable, keenly alive as was every warrior instinct within him, to remain a passive spectator of a probable war, Malek Adhel devoted his energies and his military genius to the destruction of the Christians. It was thus," continued the archbishop, "that, refusing to take sides in the great quarrel between Saladin and Noureddin, we became victims to Malek Adhel's love for his brother — to his loyalty to his king. I need not describe to you the frightful ravages he has wrought throughout the Holy Land. None of our cities, none of our armies have been able to resist this warrior whom his people surname the *Lion of Battle*, the *Thunderbolt of War*. But Ramla and Tiberias razed to the ground, Tripoli and Bethlehem in ruins, Ptolemaïs conquered, and Jerusalem lost to Christian rule, tell the story with an eloquence more impressive than words — or than these tears even, which I cannot forbear shedding when I think of our misfortune."

A painful silence fell upon the priest and his hearers, and had evil passions been possible to the pure spirit of the young novice, she would have regarded with a bitter hatred the author of such misfortunes to her people.

"Father," she ventured to observe to the archbishop: "there is something in your recital which bewilders my understanding. How inconsistent such noble and generous impulses seem to the character of the impious prince who has wrought so much evil to our holy

religion! Is it possible for infidels to possess virtues?"

"To the misfortune of humanity and the confusion of true believers, it is, my daughter," replied William. "You will frequently discover in Mussulmans — especially in Malek Adhel, sincerity, disinterestedness, and greatness of soul. But all these and other noble qualities not unknown among the infidels, are but as a tempting exterior inclosing a mass of corruption; reminding us of the fruit of which the Holy Scriptures make mention, which delights the eye with its beauty, but offers to the taste only bitter and poisonous ashes."

"But pray inform me, Father," said the queen, "how is it that Malek Adhel who departed from Egypt to avoid countenancing his brother's usurpation, now occupies the position of governor of Damietta?"

"This is what remains for me to tell," replied the archbishop: "but your majesty will permit me to finish my recital another day. At present I feel too much overcome by emotions to which such reminiscences have given birth. With him of old I lift up my voice in lamentation: 'The crown is fallen from our heads — our days are accomplished — our end is come — from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed. Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us; consider and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.'"

During the several days ensuing, the archbishop could spare to the princess only the hour devoted to religious services. Much of his time was spent with

Malek Adhel, who questioned him upon the customs and laws of Europe, and upon the characteristics of its various potentates: many hours were occupied in visiting the wounded Christians and in consoling and administering to the spiritual requirements of the dying. Most frequently he lingered beside the couch of Montmorency: less with the thought of fortifying than of admiring his courage; for submissive and with faith firm as that of the martyrs of old, Montmorency lay waiting the dread summons, ready to yield life and the high renown which enriched it, at his Maker's call.

But his hour was not yet come. Contrary to his own expectations and those of his attendants, his symptoms took a more favorable turn; his wounds healed, and convalescence gave promise of speedy recovery. Malek informed of his recovery, rejoiced, considering less the safety of an enemy than the preservation of a hero.

At length, when release from more imperative duties allowed the archbishop freer disposal of his time, the queen begged him to continue the recital of Saladin's history.

"While Malek Adhel laid waste our cities and our plains," began the prelate; "Noureddin was making preparations to chastise his unfaithful emir. He had assembled a large army and was advancing rapidly upon Egypt when death overtook him. Thus was removed the sole remaining obstacle to Saladin's ambitious schemes. With politic forethought Saladin now wedded the widow of Noureddin. This marriage to

some extent authorizing his usurpation, his brother no longer denied him support. From that hour the throne of the new sultan defied all the united powers of the Orient.

"The brothers celebrated their reconciliation with fresh conquests, Mosul, Damascus, Aleppo, succumbed; Jerusalem alone resisted their efforts. But the civil discords which divided that city awakened alarm among the Christians for its safety.

"Amaury was no more. The unfortunate Baudouin V. had not long survived him; and Sibyl, his eldest sister, heiress of the throne of Jerusalem, had caused her husband, Lusignan, to be crowned king, notwithstanding that his rights were not generally recognized. Several of Lusignan's tributary princes refused him their oaths of fealty, while Conrad, Marquis de Montferrat, actually disputed his claim to the throne. This adversary, sustained by Raymond of Tripoli, was a rival not to be despised, and would even have carried the day over Lusignan, but for a harsh and inflexible nature and an arrogant temper which alienated his adherents: while Lusignan, concealing a presumptuous ambition beneath an affable and conciliating mien, attracted partisans to himself more readily. Crafty in his plots and unwavering in their execution; impetuous in his desires, yet never losing self-control; false, treacherous, seeking in a cause not its justice but its warrant of success; possessing to a wonderful degree the art of convincing others that the good of the state and not personal aggrandizment actuated him, Lusignan

had obtained an immense advantage over a rival who had dared to menace the Christians with desertion to the side of Saladin if they did not compel Lusignan to yield him the contested crown.

"Affairs stood in this position when I received a message from the King of Jerusalem requesting my presence.

"'Father,' he said to me, 'were we in the days of the first Crusade — blessed days, when the Christians submitting themselves to one head, and joyfully sacrificing private to the general good, were worthy of the cause they were called upon to defend — I should feel no apprehension, notwithstanding the number and acknowledged bravery of our enemies; nor should I find myself reduced to the mortifying necessity of sueing for a cessation of hostilities. But since the wealth of Asia has corrupted the Christians; since they have preferred the luxuries and treasures of the Orient to the poverty and austerities of life which have hitherto distinguished the soldiers of Christ; since, in short, Palestine has given birth successively to princes of Sidon and marquises of Tyre, to counts of Jaffa and barons of Ramla, and to many others ambitious to deny the supremacy of the King of Jerusalem, the empire in dividing, has weakened its strength forever; and if we fail to obtain from Saladin a truce which will afford us time to ask and receive assistance from Europe, we shall behold the throne of Godfrey de Bouillon crumbling into ruins beneath the heel of the Saracen; and the sepulchre of Christ, gained at a cost of

so much blood and sacrifice, once more and forever in the power of the infidel. In this emergency I have recourse to your wisdom and experience. Revered by all Christendom, esteemed by even our enemies, you alone possess the power to relieve us in this trying hour. Go, Father, I implore you, to the court of Saladin, speak to him, address yourself more particularly still to Malek Adhel. He has marvellous influence over his brother: and although to him we owe our direst misfortunes, from him above all men will those very misfortunes most surely claim sympathy. As to the conditions of the proposed truce, I leave the matter entirely to your discretion, confident that the honor of Christianity which is so dear to you will not suffer stain or blemish in your hands.'

"In consenting to undertake the responsibility of this difficult and honorable embassy, I was aware that in the eyes of all the Christian world I placed myself on the side of Lusignan: but, although I did not esteem the character of that monarch, he seemed to me to possess greater ability for restoring peace to the empire. Besides, his claims were more just, and had even been confirmed by the oaths of allegiance which his subjects had rendered unto him. Honor and religion proclaimed him my king, consequently I felt no hesitancy in obeying his injunctions and repairing to the court of Saladin then assembled at Damascus.

"I must admit that never ambassador received more cordial welcome than that accorded me at Damascus. On the very day of my arrival I was admitted to an

audience with the sultan. He received me in his tent, from which luxury and display were scrupulously banished: he himself was distinguished from his subjects only by the severe simplicity of his dress. On perceiving me he greeted me with a gracious smile; and the prince, his brother, meeting me with that frank yet dignified bearing which wins all hearts to him, clasped my hand in his own.

"'Venerable pontiff,' he said, 'their sending you to us seems to predicate that the Christians desire to act in good faith, and that we may rely upon their promises. My brother is ready to lend ear to your propositions, and I will add to them the weight of my influence. Although aware that your example and eloquence have gained to your faith vast numbers of Saracen prisoners, we do not ignore that to those remaining faithful to Mahomet, protection and justice have been equally accorded; and that your loving kindness has been ever shed upon all who sorrow and are in need: therefore you shall receive at my brother's court the same honor, the same respect which, doubtless, surround you at that of Jerusalem. Whosoever sows benefits must reap gratitude. Such a man as we behold in you must possess many friends; believe me, despite the difference of religious opinion obtaining between us, not one shall you ever prove more sincere and more devoted than Malek Adhel.'

"The earnest feeling with which the Saracen prince had spoken surprised the assembled courtiers, and moved me even to tears. Perhaps," continued the

archbishop, addressing Berengaria, "your majesty may consider that the repetition of such encomiums is unbecoming the dignity of my years and position, but believe me, I have been actuated in so doing less by egotism and vain glory, than by a desire to acquaint you more intimately with the character of Malek Adhel."

"But why, Father," interrupted the Princess Matilda, with unwonted embarrassment, "why did you not avail yourself of the advantages offered by your sojourn at the court of Saladin to open the eyes of the prince to the light of the true faith?"

"I lost no opportunity, my daughter," answered the prelate, "to endeavor to effect so notable a conversion: but God's own time had not yet come. I would fain believe that He will be merciful, and that so great a soul will not remain in darkness forever."

"But surely, Father, you have petitioned Heaven for the enlightenment of Malek Adhel?"

"His name is never absent from my prayers, my daughter; for the conversion of Malek Adhel would advance the cause of Christianity far better than many a brilliant victory on the field of battle. Her majesty permitting, morning and evening in our devotions we will unite in petitioning our Heavenly Father for this much to be desired end."

Berengaria assured the archbishop of her cordial consent; while the princess announced that the usual hour of prayer having arrived, they must defer until the following day the continuation of the archbishop's interesting recital.

CHAPTER V.

SEVERAL days elapsed ere the archbishop found time to spare from his numerous duties to continue the history of Saladin's fortunes. One morning, however, he had sought the queen and Matilda in the boudoir of the former for that purpose when a black eunuch bearing a message from Malek Adhel was ushered into the presence of the queen. The prince, he informed Berengaria, having a communication of importance to make would present himself in a few moments at the palace.

At these tidings the young novice rose from her seat, a faint flush suffusing her cheek as she glanced appealingly towards the archbishop.

William reflected a few moments; then taking her hand, he led her to a seat between his own and the queen's.

"It is best that you should remain, my child," he said; "the slightest token of distrust might give the prince offense; the surest means of controlling great and generous natures is to rely upon their honor. Besides, Malek Adhel has by his delicate consideration earned our confidence, and this is the first time during our sojourn in Damietta that he has presumed to intrude upon you."

Submissive to his authority, Matilda remained,

drawing, however, her veil more closely about her face and form. Berengaria, ever thinking of her absent husband, did not doubt that the prince's important communication referred to Richard. She was on the point of sharing her pleasing anticipations with the archbishop when Malek Adhel, following close upon his message, entered the apartment.

After saluting the queen with a courtly grace he approached Matilda, gazing at her intently for several minutes. Then he turned to the archbishop.

"Venerable father of the Christians," he said, "our acquaintance is not a thing of to-day: if in religious opinion we differ I venture to hope that our natures are in more harmonious accord, and that in making mention of me to my illustrious captives you have not represented me to them as an unmerciful master — an implacable foe?"

"The princesses will doubtless reassure you on that point," William answered.

"The archbishop, Prince," said Berengaria, "has but confirmed to us the reports which everywhere have preceded you. We know that Malek Adhel is as brave as he is magnanimous; always victorious on the field of battle, always merciful after conquest; in arms he overcomes the boldest spirits; in peace he yields to the tears of misfortune. Prince, behold before you a sorrowing queen: it is not a throne she mourns and implores of you; it is a husband, to whom you alone can restore her, since you alone are arbiter of her fate."

"You mistake, madam," interposed Malek Adhel.

"Were it in truth thus, be assured your chains had long since been sundered. I desired, however, to inform you that to-morrow I shall send to ask your liberty of my brother. He will not willingly prolong your captivity. Trust to his goodness, to my intercessions — to my personal esteem and regard for you. But may I not inquire," he continued, addressing the princess with a degree of diffidence and hesitation which surprised himself, "may I not inquire whether the sister of Richard shares his queen's flattering opinion of me?"

The novice whose eyes had remained persistently fixed upon the floor since the prince's entrance, now raised them timidly to his face.

"How could it be possible for me to entertain such prepossession when I cannot even admit the existence of virtues among infidels! But granting that they do possess them, what monsters of ingratitude must they be who deny that God to whom these virtues are due!"

The prince was greatly troubled. The boldness of her denunciation and the modesty of her mien offered so singular a contrast that he gazed at her in silent wonder, making no comment. Berengaria, fearing offense, hastened to excuse her sister.

"Your highness will I trust forgive," she said, "the temerity of a young maiden who, brought up in utter seclusion from the world knows no law save that of God, and ignores the respect due to exalted secular rank. Her intention at least is meritorious; may this consideration cancel the apparent harshness of her speech, and avert your anger from her."

"My anger! It is not in the power of the Princess of England to provoke my anger against herself," rejoined Malek Adhel warmly.

"In expressing herself as she has done, the Princess Matilda has but regarded her duty." interposed the archbishop: "for the God who inspires her, the God to whom she has consecrated her life, will not suffer zeal in His holy cause to be controlled by minor considerations. What are birth, rank, honor, to her who has sacrificed them all to her soul's eternal good? Prince," he added, turning to Malek Adhel, "my words should not surprise you; for you must surely recall the unremitting efforts I made during my stay in Damascus to induce you to recognize the true faith. My dearest hopes on this point are not unknown to you: you can therefore conceive with what earnestness I join my prayers to those of the queen and the princess for your conversion."

"Is it possible," exclaimed Malek Adhel, fixing his burning gaze on Matilda; "is it possible that this lovely mouth pronounces my name without detestation! Is it possible, Princess, that notwithstanding my creed you can entertain a sentiment of interest in me?"

With flushing cheek and downcast eyes the novice answered:

"Your belief inspires me with horror — your blindness with commiseration. The empire of Satan, which the power of your arm extends, would be replaced by that of Christ were your eyes opened to the light of the true faith. Can I, then, importune high Heaven too

frequently or too earnestly for a consummation so propitious to its cause?"

"Ah, madam," cried the Saracen, seizing her hand: "your God cannot be the true God; for, hearing you, could he resist the voice of your entreaty?"

The impulsive candor of Malek Adhel troubled the young girl. Withdrawing her hand from his, she turned trembling and confused to the archbishop.

"May I not retire, Father?" she asked.

William assented, and Malek Adhel dared not interfere or seek to detain her.

"From what heaven has this houri descended," he exclaimed, as the door closed upon her; "such transcendent beauty surely exceeds that of even the celestial beings whom our prophet hath promised to the faithful!"

"The loveliness of this daughter of kings," gravely responded William, "is not indeed of this world: it emanates from a spirit which knows not stain nor blemish. Deprived of woman's chief charm—innocence, she would be but an ordinary beauty."

"No, no," interrupted the Saracen vehemently; "love would but lend her more seductive charms! Thrice happy he who shall ensnare her with love's roseate chains!"

As he heard him the heart of the archbishop seemed frozen with terror. From that moment he perceived the new-born passion of the prince and foresaw the danger it would entail upon his precious charge. But experience had taught him the necessity of opposing

policy to power; and he feigned to perceive in the words he had just heard but the exaggerated style of compliment habitual to the Oriental. Ere he could summon words to make suitable reply, the queen, following the bent of her one engrossing thought, came all unconsciously to his relief.

"Prince," she said, "you are not unaware, doubtless, of events transpiring in the camp of the Crusaders? Has a battle taken place? Has my husband been engaged?—has he been wounded?"

"If I may credit the tidings which have reached me," replied Malek Adhel, with a slight smile, "the discord which exists among the Christians will soon bring this war to a close without necessitating much effort on our part. Since the arrival of the King of England in Syria there has been no general action, although some few skirmishes have taken place in which your husband's bravery shone conspicuous, and whence he issued unharmed. Perhaps, your majesty, it may be in my power to offer you more complete and satisfactory information upon my return."

"What, my lord," cried Berengaria, alarmed; "is Ptolemaïs your destination? Do you go to seek my husband's life?"

"No, your majesty," replied the prince; "my brother's commands retain me still in Egypt. He desires me to repair to Cairo to seek fresh troops. This duty performed, I shall return hither to await his permission to rejoin him. During my absence your will shall be supreme in this palace: your slightest wish

shall be respected. I stipulate solely that according to our customs, which exact strict seclusion of women, you rarely admit to your presence the gentlemen of your suite; and grant to none of them permission to enter your grounds. My request does not include you, Father," he added, addressing the archbishop; "the profound veneration with which your virtues have inspired me disposes me rather to offer obedience than to presume to lay my own commands upon you. I am aware that you are the only comforter, the sole dependence of the princesses in their present need. Do not leave them; and may the liberty I bestow upon you to be always near them answer for the purity of my intentions."

Renewing his promise to Berengaria to intercede in her behalf with Saladin, Malek Adhel saluted the queen and the archbishop and took his departure.

Once more alone with the queen William gave expression to the anxious forebodings which oppressed him.

"Tremble, your majesty," he said, "for the princess Matilda. Her beauty has enflamed the passions of the infidel. I know but too well the nature of Malek Adhel. His heart is filled with generous impulses, but his passions are strong and ill-used to constraint. If God shields her not with the ægis of His divine power, her modest virtues alone will not protect her."

"Do you not think your fears magnify the extent of her danger, Father?" said the queen: "Is love the growth of a day?— a moment? The prince scarcely

knows my sister; and although beauty attracts, it is surely incapable of inspiring a lasting attachment."

"Your majesty," replied the prelate gravely; "we are not now in Europe where women, free to choose, require time to assume and accept obligations of so exclusive and enduring a character that only a close mutual knowledge and esteem can consecrate them to happiness. But here in the East where women are mere slaves or playthings of a capricious master, where moral attributes are in no wise considered and only mere personal charms valued, a moment suffices to inflame men's senses."

"You believe then, Father, that the prince has become enamored of Matilda?"

"I am surprised that so great a misfortune has escaped the penetration of your majesty."

"But why consider this love a misfortune, Father? Know you not that the wishes of the one beloved are irresistible? If it be indeed true that my sister is dear to the Saracen prince, a word from her will suffice to restore us to liberty and enable us to return to the camp of our people."

"Nature and my sacred calling," replied William, "have shielded me from that fevered dream the world calls love; but as far as observation reveals it to me, it appears to me that he who is under its influence respects neither duty nor promises — that there is nothing sacred to him: that, in short, there is nothing he is not willing to grant to love save the sacrifice of love itself. Hence I can readily believe that Malek

Adhel would refuse nothing to Matilda excepting that which would put an obstacle to his passion. Provided that she remain with him, possibly he would consent to restore us to liberty; but, madam, would that content you? Could you summon courage to desert your young and innocent sister in her hour of sorest need?"

"But," hesitated the queen, "of what avail would my presence be to Matilda? Should I not serve her better by sending Richard to her aid than by remaining passively here sharing her sorrow? Surely you do not distrust her virtue; nor can you deem a prince such as you have described Malek Adhel capable of taking undue advantage of his power over her?"

"I perceive," said the archbishop with evident displeasure, "that no one could carry conjugal affection to greater extremes than does your majesty. No, madam, I do not distrust the moral attributes of yon pure maiden; but Malek Adhel's seductive graces are marvellous; exposure to their influence is the most severe trial innocence can endure. Your majesty is too well assured of the ardent love which attaches me to the faith of Christ to suppose a Mahometan prince capable of inspiring me with an unreasoning enthusiasm; but I venture to declare to you, madam, that neither Philip Augustus, nor yet the illustrious Richard — the two most gallant among our European sovereigns — possess such dazzling qualities, such graces of intellect, such rare fascination of manner, as are conspicuous in the brother of Saladin. But a prey to the errors of his creed, such advantages become only a source of evil,

and are conducive to great misfortunes. May I make bold to inform you, madam, that they have already caused the ruin of a Christian maiden?—a maiden born near the throne of that Jerusalem where her father had reigned, and where her Saviour had died. Doubtless you have heard of Agnes, daughter of Amaury and of Marie, niece of the Emperor of Constantinople—Agnes, so celebrated throughout the East for her beauty and her courage, who sword in hand braved death on many a battle-field; and who renouncing the habits of her sex for the sake of glory, became eventually its reproach. Proud amazon! she despised the modest virtues of her companions; she derided their acquiescence in the seclusion suitable to their sex and tastes; she gloried in her warlike inclinations, and possessing a heart devoid of pity, was nevertheless controlled by its weaknesses. Had she not forfeited the power to blush, she would at least have blushed for her unholy love for a Saracen!"

"Heavens! what would you have me infer from your speech," cried the queen much shocked.

"A cruel—a fearful truth, whose very recalling wounds my heart afresh! But I will give you the particulars of this wretched affair when I resume my relation of Saladin and his empire. You will probably then be better able to apprehend what we may have to fear or to hope from Malek Adhel."

A few days after this conversation the queen sent word to the archbishop that she would await him, with Matilda, in the orange grove nearest the palace where

they would be pleased, were he at leisure, to listen to the conclusion of a history which so greatly interested them.

Berengaria and her sister, enveloped in their ample veils, descended arm in arm to the garden. As they paced the serpentine paths threading the orange grove where they had appointed the meeting with the archbishop, an unwonted sound as of human steps issued from the midst of the thick undergrowth which tapestried the dividing wall, startling the princesses and inspiring them with a vague sense of alarm. Presently to their no slight surprise the overhanging vines parted, disclosing a small door cut into the wall and standing upon its threshold a female habited in the Asiatic garb who regarded the royal prisoners with a strangely wistful yet bewildered expression of countenance. Berengaria reassured, now advanced to welcome one who seemed in even greater distress than herself. The woman, pale and trembling, rushed forward and threw herself at the feet of the queen.

Perceiving by her mien and conduct that the stranger was a suppliant, Matilda, whom a natural timidity had withheld from following her sister, now came forward and kindly endeavored to raise the unfortunate petitioner, but the woman, pressing the hem of the princess' robe to her lips, gave utterance to her grief in sobs and tears.

"Oh, holy garb — oh, cross of redemption," she cried. "Oh, virgin worthy of wearing them, blessed art thou! — Ah, lady," she added, as Matilda again attempted to raise and comfort her; "I am unworthy

the touch of your chaste hands. I am a wretch degraded by the blackest of crimes. I have renounced my God and my country to follow hither my royal and guilty mistress. Seduced by a great warrior, she sacrificed all things to an unhallowed passion, never doubting that she must reign a queen forever in the heart of Malek Adhel, sharing with him the greatness of Saladin. But alas for all her proud anticipations! Malek Adhel loads her with contempt: he treats the daughter of Amaury, who so freely gave herself up to him, as though she were the veriest slave purchased with a price. She is dying of grief and shame. Several times has she thought of leaving forever this wretched place: but a lingering love for him who despises her, still more, a dread of the contempt which must greet her in the camp of her countrymen, have hitherto restrained her. Sometimes seizing her javelin she has challenged her ungrateful lover to mortal combat; he always answers that he knows not how to fight with a woman, nor how to love a woman who knows how to fight. Finally, madam, when we learned that you were in Damietta and, although a prisoner were treated with all the honor due your exalted rank, I implored my mistress to permit me to seek audience of you, trusting that from your mercy we may obtain assistance. The pride of Amaury's daughter influenced her to withhold her consent; but this morning a fresh affront induced her to make the effort at all costs to sever the chains which bind her, and to entrust her fate into your hands. Will you credit, madam, the insult to which the royal Agnes

has just been subjected! It was not enough it seems to confound the daughter of Amaury with the crowd of ordinary women composing the seraglio of Malek Adhel; it was not enough to treat her with a contemptuous reserve: it was not enough to ignore her love—her very presence; he desires now to bestow her upon another before his departure from Cairo. Upon quitting your palace, madam, the prince declared to all his women that he intended to renounce them forever, and that he would select husbands for them from among the emirs of his court. And this humiliating command which his slaves must perforce obey, he had dared to give likewise to the Princess of Jerusalem. Justly indignant, she announced to him her intention of quitting on the instant the palace of a tyrant who had dared to threaten her with such degradation. But Malek Adhel haughtily replied:

"'In giving yourself to me, in adopting the faith of Mahomet, you became a slave. The customs of the Seraglio deprive me of the power to restore you to liberty. Choose then between the master I offer you and a life-long imprisonment. On my return from Cairo I shall be prepared to hear your decision and to act accordingly.'

"With these bitter words he left her, and my lady in despair was drawing her poinard from her girdle in order to put an end to her existence, when I arrested her hand. With tears I pleaded with her, and finally I succeeded in obtaining permission to seek you and implore your protection.

"I should have sought you immediately in your palace, but I was not at liberty to leave that of the prince. I then endeavored to discover some private means of egress, and finally became acquainted with a secret door in the wall which divides these grounds from those of the Seraglio. Through this private entrance — unknown even to Malek Adhel himself — my mistress will come, disguised in my garments, to kneel before you, to implore you in the name of that Saviour who turns not away from the pleadings of a contrite heart, to save her from the degradation to which an infidel would consign her."

Bowing her forehead to the dust, the slave silently awaited the reply of the princesses.

Berengaria, her sympathizing heart ever on the alert to relieve the need of the sorrowing or repentant, answered in befitting words: "We are but captives ourselves," she said kindly, "yet, should we fail in our efforts to obtain from Malek Adhel the release of the unfortunate Agnes, we will do all in our power to assist her flight. But," she added, "I shall exact a promise of the Princess of Jerusalem. She must be aware that a crime such as hers closes upon her forever among the Christians the doors of social intercourse. In a cloister only can she seek to expiate her errors and obtain pardon from a merciful God."

"You speak wisely, royal lady," sobbed the slave; "'tis in such holy retreat indeed that my mistress and I would fain bury our shame, and where an eternity of tears could never wash out our sins."

"If such be indeed your resolve," replied Berengaria, "you have my royal word that I will never forsake your mistress or yourself. But tell me; is the motive which influences the prince to such singular proceedings suspected? Is it known why his women have so suddenly become repulsive to him?"

"It is whispered, your majesty, that a new love — conceived and born in one brief moment, actuates him; that this love, pure, ardent, generous, resembling the sentiment which animates our own knights, and worthy, in a word, of her who inspires it, has closed the heart of Malek Adhel to all other passions."

"And is the name of the lady who has wrought so marvellous a change known to the world?"

"Without doubt, madam; but your majesty will pardon me if the respect with which that name inspires me forbids me to pronounce it in her presence."

Berengaria readily understood the slave's ambiguous speech; but Matilda gave it slight heed. She had listened to the story of the daughter of Amaury with a sense of unutterable horror. Unable to comprehend crimes so new to her pure mind, she yet was troubled by the strange thoughts suggested by the slave's recital. So much at least she understood; that a Christian maiden had denied her God and her people; that she had chosen a master, a Mussulman master; and that she had sacrificed at strange altars. She shivered with fear as she pondered these matters in her heart.

"Heavens, madam," cried the slave starting to her feet: "is it not the Archbishop of Tyre whom I see ap-

proaching? I cannot; no, I dare not yet endure his severe scrutiny. It is his contempt which my mistress most dreads when she thinks of escape."

"William's words, however, are most consoling — most reassuring," said the princess.

"Aye; to you, lady, who are pure and without reproach," replied the slave; "but to a sinful creature like me, how dreadful is the presence of the man of God!"

Saluting the princesses hastily, but with infinite respect, the woman withdrew, departing through the secret passage whence she had come: and Berengaria, rejoining the archbishop, repeated to him the substance of the confession and petition to which she had just listened. William did not conceal the surprise caused by the queen's communication, thanking God that He had at last touched the heart of the erring Princess of Jerusalem.

"She should not thus fear me," he said; "if her repentance be sincere, I shall sustain her amid the terrors which the enormity of her offense must awaken within her. And you, my child," he added, drawing nearer the young princess, "you who seem still aghast at the fearful recital which has profaned your pure ears, rest assured that Heaven would not have permitted you to hear such things if their knowledge were not some day to be of benefit to you. You may perchance be tried in a crucible where innocence alone were powerless to save, and it may be that Divine wisdom foresees that you will require the light of knowledge to enable you to

measure the abyss of evil into which human passions beguile the unwary. But come, my child, let us conclude the history of Saladin. You will learn of the misfortunes of your brothers — you will sorrow for their sins, and for the punishment entailed upon them in return; you will learn by their example to expect not happiness, but self-denial as your portion in this world."

CHAPTER VI.

"I HAD been less than a month at the court of Damascus," began the archbishop, "when I obtained of Saladin, through the influence of Malek Adhel, a truce of three years; and with terms so advantageous that Lusignan himself would never have ventured upon asking them. Malek Adhel, full of generous confidence, had induced his brother to rely upon my simple word— demanding no gage of town, citadel, or stronghold.

"Already had the treaty been drawn up; already had the sultan issued orders for the suspension during the truce of the labors then going on upon the fortifications at Ramla; when the Marquis of Montferrat, being informed of news so favorable to the cause of his rival, forgot that they were still more so to that of the Christians, and decided to cancel by his treachery the good I had effected. At the very time when hostilities were suspended and the truce was to be signed, Conrad, at the head of his soldiers, set forth to attack

and pillage a caravan loaded with treasure, which Saladin was sending to the Caaba at Mecca.

"At the tidings of this treacherous act the court of Damascus, where I yet lingered, reëchoed with expressions of indignation and resentment. The sultan could not be induced to recognize that the interests of Lusignan and those of Conrad being antagonistic, the one could not justly be held accountable for the acts of the other. He took account only of the outrage that had been committed; considering all Christians accomplices, and all of them equally deserving of his vengeful ire. In the first outburst of his indignation he ordered that I should be secured with heavy chains and cast into a dungeon. Malek Adhei opposed this proceeding, although he shared his brother's sense of injury — although he had the greater cause for anger against the Christians, since he had pledged his word for their good faith. He represented to his brother that the treachery of their enemy in no wise sanctioned treachery on their part; that the person of an ambassador was sacred; and that while despising those whose interests I had sought to advance, he would defend the life and liberty of their envoy to the last drop of his blood. Saladin's was a noble answer:

"'I value my empire far less than that true friend who has prevented me from committing a heinous offense. Do with the archbishop as you will.'

"'Your subjects,' rejoined Malek Adhel, 'are so much incensed against the wretched traitors who have dared to attack the treasure sent by you to the tomb of

our Prophet, that a priest of their faith could scarcely pass through our territory in safety. Grant me permission then to accompany the archbishop to the gates of Jerusalem. That duty fulfilled, I will return to ask another favor at your hands: another duty, no less sacred, requires me to avenge my brother, the Prophet, and the dishonorable violation of a treaty which even the most barbarous nations would have held sacred.'

"'So be it,' cried Saladin; 'before many days I shall lay siege to Jerusalem, and may this sword which I now bestow upon you be the first to gleam upon its ramparts.'

"Malek Adhel kissed the jewelled crescent upon its hilt, and vowed to fulfil his brother's behest.

"But too faithfully was that compact accomplished. After having, with the most considerate courtesy and respect, conveyed me in safety to my people, Malek Adhel pursued Conrad's army on its return to Tyre, laden with the spoils of the caravan sent by Saladin to Mecca. He attacked and overpowered it, taking a large number of prisoners, among whom were Raymond of Tripoli and Renaud of Châtillon. This victory accomplished, he learned that a battle was about to take place before Tiberias, and hastened thither to our undoing. Unfortunately Lusignan refused to listen to my counsels, and instead of fortifying himself within the walls of Jerusalem as prudence dictated, he threw wide the gates of that city and marched forth at the head of his army to meet the foe.

"You are but too well aware of the misfortunes of

that memorable day, in which the empire of Christianity in the Orient well nigh succumbed. The main body of the Templars overthrown, our most illustrious captains killed, Lusignan taken prisoner, were but precursors of a still greater calamity. Jerusalem still resisted. But what defense could women, children and old men offer against a numerous and victorious army? In vain Sibyl endeavored to encourage the few men who had been left in charge of the city by Lusignan; in vain did I assure the despairing populace that it was far better to die upon the sepulchre of Our Lord, than to abandon it into the hands of the infidel. Only a gloomy silence replied to our entreaties. Famine, cruel famine, had crushed the spirit of the people. The holy Temple was deserted. With white, hunger-tortured faces, women and children dragged themselves through the streets to dispute with the most loathsome beasts the rank weeds of their pastures. No sound was heard save the ceaseless plaint of the famished, the faint wail of the dying. Thus were verified unto us the words of the prophet:

"'The elders of the daughters of Zion sit upon the ground and keep silence; they have cast up dust upon their heads: they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground.'

"Alas, madam, how shall I describe to you that day of gloom and bitter humiliation, when we found ourselves compelled to capitulate; — that sorrowful day when Jerusalem opened her gates to the infidel, and Malek

Adhel raised upon her walls the standard of the Crescent! And yet I must admit that to that prince we were indebted for most honorable terms of capitulation; and for permission to retire to Antioch with our families and our treasure. He set free all the prisoners he had taken at Tiberias, and ransomed from his own private resources those captives who were not under his own immediate control. He richly endowed those widows whose husbands had fallen in the recent contest and ordered that the wounded should be cared for at his expense, obtaining permission of Saladin that the Hospitallers should continue their attendance upon them as long as was necessary to their recovery. In a word, madam, I must confess that on this occasion Malek Adhel evinced a magnanimity unparalleled in this, or perhaps in any other age. The entire East marvelled and admired. Mussulmans were proud to claim him as their prince: Christians recognized him as one truly great of character: praises and blessings were bestowed upon him by friend and foe. And at this torch of universal homage was lighted the flame of that fatal passion which wrecked the honor of Amaury's daughter.

"This princess was with Lusignan at the head of the Christian army which was vanquished at Tiberias. Rushing ever into the hottest of the fray, she found herself, as it were, the shadow of Malek Adhel. On more than one occasion she even measured weapons with that redoubtable warrior. But she succumbed at last to the power of an arm which none yet had ever been able to resist. Disarmed, and at the mercy of her

antagonist, she confessed to the astonished prince that the foe he had found it so difficult to conquer was a woman — and she followed him after the battle to his tent.

"From that day Agnes abandoned the cause of the Christians: she renounced her faith, and became the chief slave of him towards whom enmity was her birthright. It was thus that Agnes in violating the instincts of her sex had likewise relinquished its virtues. Consequently, the sentiment with which the Saracen prince inspired her was not that tender devotion which modesty sanctions in woman, but a frenzied passion such as obtains within the heart of a warrior, and which, like a fiery torrent rushed onward tumultuously — heedless of obstacles as of the ruins it creates. Agnes, loving Malek Adhel as she had loved war, and accustomed to no control save that of her own impulses, resolved to become the wife of the Saracen prince; and he, although he could entertain no sentiment of esteem towards her, yielded to her wishes."

"He consented to give the name of wife to a woman whom he did not esteem!" interrupted Berengaria.

"The name of wife is far less sacred among the Mussulmans than with us," replied the archbishop: "a number of women share it, and the will of their master is the law which repudiates them."

"And can it be possible," again interrupted the queen, "that a Christian woman could submit herself to such humiliation?"

"Ah, madam," replied the prelate, "this shameful folly, miscalled love, had taught Agnes to glory in her humiliation — to glory in a passion which could dare to set at defiance the opinion of men and the anger of God. And thus, self-deceived, she mistook notoriety for fame, she exchanged the spinning-wheel for the sword, and the peaceful shades of seclusion for the blaze of battle. Such must ever be the fate of those women who, despising the station in which God has placed them, exchange their own meek virtues for the bolder prerogatives of man. In attempting to embody the attributes of the two sexes, which God has made separate and distinct, they succeed only in adopting the vices of each."

"And what subsequently became of Agnes, Father," inquired the queen: "surely she no longer knew happiness."

"No, madam;" replied William; "ill-regulated passions which lead to crime, lead likewise to sorrow. Agnes has suffered according to her deserts. Although a Moslem ignores that refinement of sentiment which takes small account of external charms unaccompanied by moral qualities, yet she has experienced the mortification of being despised by her seducer. A Christian, in Malek Adhel's place, would doubtless have repulsed with contempt a young girl who had given herself to him unasked. Malek Adhel at least hesitated — and hesitation was much for him: for, such are the requirements of our religion over all others that the same act which, with the infidel is a rare virtue is to us a simple

duty. In this struggle between passion and honor, Malek Adhel in resisting even for a moment the voice of the former, was commendable; whereas a Christian, demurring an instant to the demands of the latter, was guilty. We need not follow the downward course of Agnes. Let us cast a veil over the errors of this wretched princess: let us not cherish remembrance of her faults, since she begins to repent of them. Rather let us endeavor to cultivate a sentiment of charity towards her, lest we find ourselves more severe than that God whose mercy is inexhaustible.

"But to return. It was a sad day — that upon which we were compelled to cede Jerusalem to the Moslems. Those who had been most vehement in their demands that the city should be surrendered, now wept that the cries of their necessity had been answered. It was touching to behold the spectacle of men who, repenting of their dissensions, implored a mutual forgiveness; and clinging to the very walls of their temples, or bathing with bitter tears the holy places which had once known the visible presence of their God, united their plaints to Heaven for the withdrawal of blessings which their own acts had forfeited.

Queen Sibyl, with shorn head, and enveloped in garments of deepest mourning, walked at the head of her sorrowing subjects. Saladin seemed moved at the sight of her grief. He advanced to meet her. He had just been knighted by his prisoner, Hugh of Tiberias, he said, and he desired to consecrate the day to the laws of chivalry by granting her a boon according to the cus-

toms of the ancient Paladins. Without a moment's hesitation the queen demanded her husband's liberty. The artful monarch, who had anticipated nothing else, feigned surprise, and pretended to acquiesce only through regard for his promise; while, in fact, he was well-pleased at so excellent a pretext to restore Lusignan his freedom — fully aware as he was that his presence among them would prove a source of fresh dissensions among the Christians. In fact, had Lusignan remained in captivity, the opposing factions would have gathered to the standard of Conrad, and, united, have successfully opposed the forces of Saladin. Instead of this, Lusignan was no sooner at liberty than he resumed the assertion of his claims to the throne he had just lost. Conrad, enraged at his persistence, closed upon his rival the gates of Tyre — the sole city in the East claiming Christian supremacy. Then party spirit ran high: a sentiment of animosity divided the Christians, and the mutual hatred existing between Lusignan and Conrad became intensified to such a degree that it far exceeded that which either entertained toward Saladin himself: and while despising my remonstrances and forgetting in their private quarrels the interests of religion, they thus shamelessly disputed for a throne they had not known how to defend. All the Orient, dazzled by the seeming magnanimity of Saladin, applauded his conduct — praising to the skies an act which was prompted solely by political intrigue.

"Matters stood in this position when I embarked for Europe. You are aware, madam, of the powerful

assistance I obtained from the Christian princes. Not content to send forth their subjects to fields of fame and glory, they themselves set them a noble example, and answered in person our call of distress. Not even their ancestors, who had won renown in the war of the first Crusade, were inspired by a greater degree of enthusiasm, nor were more impatient to shed their blood for the reconquest of the holy sepulchre. Ah, surely now, in the presence of Richard and of Philip Augustus and of so many other great and noble princes, must these suicidal quarrels be stilled!— Oh, Heavenly Father," added the archbishop, with uplifted, pleading eyes, "permit not the destruction of our fair hopes; for the sins of the few, turn not Thy countenance from the many who have offered up such noble sacrifice unto Thy holy cause. Rather may Thy people, purified by suffering, wiser and more virtuous from the teachings of a bitter experience, become more and more closely united — one in heart, as they are one in faith!"

So absorbed was the venerable man in his thoughts, so prophetic seemed to him these aspirations for the advancement of religion, that he was overcome with emotion. He ceased speaking; but his inspired face, his uplifted gaze, his eloquent silence, betrayed the spirit still at prayer even when the lips had ceased to move.

The first shadows of the twilight were already creeping into the fragrant-scented orange-grove, bringing in their mystic train tender reveries and pious meditation, when a faint rustling sound, as of a woman's garment

trailing through the leaves, aroused the archbishop and the princesses from a train of solemn thought. Then a female in the garb of a slave issued from the secret doorway and advanced towards them with trembling step and downcast mien.

"Who are you?" asked William, going to meet the strange visitor.

As though unable to speak, the woman cast herself upon the ground at his feet, sobbing piteously.

"Unhappy Agnes, is it indeed you?" exclaimed the archbishop, unconsciously recoiling from her clinging hands.

"Holy Father," cried the unhappy Princess of Jerusalem; "have mercy upon me—do not crush me utterly with your contempt — haply I have not long to live!"

"Do not refuse to comfort her, Father," pleaded Matilda, hurrying forward at the cry of distress; "even yet you may win her back to the God she has forsaken!"

"Is it the Princess of England who intercedes for me," cried Agnes, starting to her feet. "Aye, I recognize her by her religious habit — by her marvellous and fatal beauty!— God! am I then reduced to such depth of humiliation that I must needs be indebted to her who has so cruelly wronged me?"

"What do you say?" cried the young novice, amazed. "A stranger in Damietta — a prisoner in this palace — aware of your very name and existence scarcely an hour since — for what do you reproach me? — What evil can I possibly have brought upon you?"

"She asks me," cried Agnes piteously; "she who has exiled me from the heart where once I reigned supreme — she who has robbed me of a love for which I sacrificed all the other blessings of life — she who is the sole cause of my humiliation and my despair . . . !"

"Stop, Agnes!" interrupted the archbishop imperiously; "your humiliation is the result of your sin. Oh, miserable woman, if you were penetrated by a sincere repentance would such language soil your lips? Would you not rather bless the opportunity which, in depriving you of the object of your criminal passion, has directed you towards the fount of Divine mercy?"

"Why speak to me of mercy — of Heaven," cried the half-frenzied woman. "What would Heaven be to me without Malek Adhel? What god can I call upon when he whom I chose forsakes and scorns me?"

"If such be your sentiments," said the archbishop severely; "if you still wilfully cling to your errors, why are you here? Why profane the ears of this chaste maiden, this noble queen, with your licentious plaints? What seek you of me?"

Haughtily the daughter of Amaury answered him: "I came hither to seek protection against an ingrate who repudiates me. I come to ask arms to defend and avenge myself. Restore me my sword and lance, and my arm will know how to save the Princess of Jerusalem from the fate of a vile slave!"

"And what claim has the Princess of Jerusalem to a greater degree of leniency?" demanded the archbishop coldly. "Have not her own actions placed her beneath

the level of the most degraded of her sex?— Go, wretched woman; return to yonder abode of shame — grovel at the feet of your scornful Moslem — intercede with the impostor you have acknowledged before men! The day of judgment is at hand: the wrath of an outraged Deity broods like a threatening storm-cloud above you: through the voice of his servant He is about to pronounce upon you sentence of eternal condemnation!"

"Father," pleaded the Princess of England, clasping his hand — already uplifted, as he seemed in the very act of uttering the fearful anathema of the Church; "have mercy yet upon her. She is weak — strengthen and sustain her with your wisdom; she is erring — pity and subdue her with the power of your eloquence and piety!"

"Yes, Father," added the queen, "try first the effect of gentleness; surely you would rather save than condemn her?"

"Aye, you speak truly!" William replied, wiping the tears from his wrinkled cheeks. "Madam, you little imagine the pain which her obduracy inflicts upon me; nor how gladly I would shed my blood to cancel her sin. But what can I do if she repent not? How can I petition God to save one who repents not of her sins against Him!"

He ceased; for the slave who had previously spoken to the queen was seen hurriedly advancing towards them.

"Your absence has been discovered, madam," she breathlessly exclaimed, addressing her mistress. "They

are searching the seraglio for you. I have taken advantage of the disturbance to which your flight has given rise to rejoin you. Here at least we are safe; for yon secret entrance is unknown to those who would betray; and, by order of the prince, the palace of the Queen of England is inviolable."

"You perceive, madam," said Agnes, addressing Berengaria, "that my fate is in your hands. Will you not grant me sanctuary in your palace? Will you not restore to me my liberty — my arms; and grant me the opportunity to revenge my wrongs?"

Matilda shuddered at her words; nor was Berengaria to be thus persuaded. Agnes perceived her hesitation and hastened to change her tone.

"I am perhaps awkward in my mode of address, your majesty," she said, with proud humility; "but, accustomed since childhood to command, the language of entreaty is foreign to me: I have had recourse to it only in order to escape slavery — never would these lips have given it utterance merely to save my life."

"I will not refuse your prayer;" said the queen after a moment's hesitation. "I will not lose the opportunity thus afforded to rescue your soul from a slavery far more fatal than that which threatens your person. Come, Agnes; come to our household of Christians — come and weep for the day in which you ceased to claim them as brothers, come; and by constant prayer endeavor to obtain of God's infinite mercy that forgiveness which man will perhaps prove less ready to grant. I will see Prince Malek Adhel on his

return from Cairo: I will ask him to permit your departure from . . ."

"No, madam, no!" interrupted Agnes vehemently: "ask nothing of him for me. I prefer to owe him neither my liberty nor my future well-being. Leave to me the care of my fate henceforth: across the desert, armed and on foot, I will seek an abiding-place — I will carve out my own destinies — be they brilliant, be they ill-omened, I shall owe them only to your goodness and to my own courage."

But the archbishop here interposed, assuring Agnes that such freedom as she desired could not at present be granted her; and that she must abide in peace and content near her benefactress until such time as it became feasible to allow her to depart.

Agnes dared not remonstrate with the archbishop. Lowering her veil, she leaned upon the arm of her slave and followed the queen into the palace.

Being attended only by her own people, Berengaria felt secure of their discretion with regard to the presence of Amaury's daughter in her household. Matilda cheerfully relinquished her own chamber to the Princess of Jerusalem, and retired to a small, plainly-furnished cabinet adjoining.

Once more alone, the remembrance of that which she had heard — of what she had understood, and of much more that was incomprehensible to her, opened to Matilda a new field of speculation, and revealed to her the fact that the world and the heart of man were full of hitherto unsuspected mysteries. She chided herself

for entertaining thoughts which were not meet for her: but the very efforts she made to repulse them but recalled them with greater force, and the inquisitiveness of a young girl who is curious to know what is concealed from her, contended with the modesty of the maiden who is troubled at that which she intuitively perceives.

However, the influence of sixteen years of innocence ere long overcame the disquietude wrought by the revelations of a few hours, and offering to God her accustomed prayers, she soon forgot the confessions, the wrongs, and the accusations of Agnes; and of all the sentiments which had agitated her pure spirit, there remained only a tender pity for sorrows whose origin was to her still a mystery.

CHAPTER VII.

THE Princess of Jerusalem had too long been a stranger to that peace which existed within the pure heart of the young novice, to be able to enjoy the same healthful repose. The tortures of an alarmed conscience and a humiliated pride closed her heart to the soothing influence of a sincere repentance. More angered at her mortification — the outgrowth of her errors — than repentant of her sins, her occasional impulses of remorse were barren of legitimate fruition. A bitter hatred possessed her, as well for the lover who scorned her as for

the benefactress who had rescued her; for the false prophet to whom she had sacrificed as for the God whom she had betrayed; for the innocent maiden who had been preferred before her as for — most bitter thought of all! — herself. From herself, from her shame, she could never escape — the thought was madness to the wretched woman.

If sometimes the image of Malek Adhel came to divert her from self contemplation, it was but to change the channel, not the source of her anguish: for not only had she incurred the contempt of him to whom she had sacrificed all, but she was on the point of being separated from him forever.

As this thought suggested itself to her, a cry wrung from her agony escaped the lips of the wretched woman. Matilda heard it; and thus rudely awakened, arose and listened.

The first rays of morning already streaked the eastern horizon, but none of the usual tokens of domestic service were to be heard in the still silent palace.

Presently sounds of sobs and moans issuing from the chamber occupied by Agnes betrayed to the young girl the source whence had proceeded the agonized cry which had so startled her. She hastened to offer comfort to the unfortunate. She found Agnes pacing the floor with rapid strides; livid with pain and sleeplessness — tearless in her grief.

"What do you want of me!" she demanded on perceiving Matilda: "Do you bring your angel-face hither to mock at the demons which possess me?"

"The sound of your sorrow aroused me, Agnes," the novice answered kindly, "and I came hither, thinking I might perchance render you some service."

"Service! Aye! would you indeed serve me? Would you bring me surcease of sorrow? Then restore to me the heart you have stolen! Give me back the love of Malek Adhel! Give me back my lover!"

"I thank my Heavenly Father, Agnes, that the heart of that infidel is not at my disposal!"

"Ah, would that you spoke truly," cried Agnes, seizing her hand: "I would give my life to believe you! Listen; if ever he should offer you that heart which is at once my bane and my blessing — in this world as in the next — refuse it, lest you become the thing I am!"

"But may you not henceforth lead a new, a better life?" asked Matilda, not deigning to notice counsel so insulting to her purity of heart. "Can you not leave your betrayer forever?"

"Leave him! Leave Malek Adhel! No: 'tis impossible! I have not strength sufficient to wrest myself from the delights of his love. Ah, if you but knew the happiness of forgetting in his arms, one's country — one's kindred — one's crimes — aye, one's very God! — You shudder, Matilda; never before have you heard such revelation of human love. Well! you know not all yet; you know not into what extremes of impiety my wild passion has beguiled me. I have wished for the annihilation of Christ's reign upon earth lest it should eclipse my lover's. To behold him king over all kings was my proudest ambition. I would have fol-

lowed him upon the battle-field, and fought against the cause I once upheld. To defend his dear life I would have drawn sword against my own kindred — against the God of my fathers! And now that William of Tyre opens to me the road to repentance; now that my ungrateful lover deserts and scorns me, the thought of flight, the thought of being forever separated from him, is more terrible to me than that of eternal condemnation.— And you, cruel girl, author of all my misfortunes, leave me; go tell your archbishop that I will have none of his Heaven, which refuses me the love of Malek Adhel!"

Spellbound with terror, Matilda had heard the ravings of the infatuated Agnes. Anxious to escape the shame of listening to an avowal which inspired her with disgust, yet fearing to desert her in a state of mind bordering upon frenzy, she heard with a sense of relief the approaching footsteps of her women, and summoning them to the assistance of Agnes, she withdrew to dispatch a messenger to the archbishop.

Upon his arrival in answer to her summons, Matilda hastened to share with him her anxious fears.

"Father," she said, "the Princess of Jerusalem is very ill. A burning fever possesses her, and reason has almost deserted her brain. She raves only of the joys of crime — the delights of impiety. Malek Adhel is more to her than God himself. . ."

"Cease, my child," cried William; "defile not your pure lips with such blasphemy: endeavor to efface her words from your memory, and take heed that you seek

not to comprehend their import. Go now to the queen; occupy yourselves with your devotions, and do not return to your chamber until you have first seen me."

Inclining her head before the venerable prelate the young princess obeyed, and departed in search of the queen.

But Berengaria was not in the oratory, nor yet in her private apartments. Upon inquiry of a page who chanced to be passing, she learned that the queen was in the great jasper-columned saloon. Thither Matilda followed her. She found Berengaria reposing among the cushions which surrounded the fountain in the centre of the luxurious apartment; an elegantly appointed table stood before her, and about her were gathered a crowd of beautiful Circassian slaves bearing baskets of luscious fruits and garlands of perfume-laden flowers.

"Good-morrow, sister, and welcome;" cried Berengaria, greeting the young girl affectionately: "The prince has just returned to Damietta. He will be here shortly to give us tidings of our people. Meanwhile he sends his women to divert us. Come, sit here and enjoy the entertainment with me."

With throbbing heart and reddening cheek, the princess obeyed.

The young slaves began to dance to the sound of castanet, cymbal and timbrel; but in their music, and still more in their motions, there was a voluptuousness which disturbed the queen and alarmed the novice. Matilda turned away from a scene which offended

her sense of delicacy; and rising, withdrew to the open casement at the opposite end of the saloon. Parting the silken draperies, she beheld the tender radiance of the skies, the fresh verdure of tree and shrub; she breathed the pure morning air, fragrant with tribute from the grateful flowers. Nature offered so delicious a contrast to the scenes of sensual indulgence to which she had so lately become an involuntary witness, that she yielded to its tempting allurements and descended to the gardens for a solitary stroll.

Following the course of a tiny stream that rippled over a bed of silver-white sand and kissed the trailing boughs of lemon and rose trees, the young girl walked on, without noticing the shifting scene, from flower-gemmed lawn and shady grove to the denser growth of woodland into which she presently discovered her unwary footsteps had beguiled her.

Several paths here intersected each other; and becoming bewildered, Matilda unconsciously forsook that which she had been following and strayed into another at hazard; until she presently found herself hopelessly entangled in a labyrinth of greenery from which there appeared no available outlet.

But the spot, with its purling brook and fragrant wild flowers and melodious songsters, was one of such rare loveliness that the spellbound maiden, though awed by solitude so absolute, felt no sense of alarm.

After awhile, wearied by her long walk, she stopped to rest beneath the mingling shade of plantain and twining jessamine. The peaceful silence of the place

calmed her troubled spirit. Thoughts of Agnes and her impious words faded into the distant realms of memory, and were succeeded by vague and sweet reveries, pure and tranquil as her surroundings.

Revelling in these, the first moments of entire liberty she had ever tasted, enthralled by the spells which Nature casts only upon the pure in spirit, Matilda took no heed of the passing hours, and the morning was already far spent ere she thought of endeavoring to find egress from her woodland retreat.

Meanwhile Malek Adhel had been to the palace. Surprised and disappointed at not finding the princess with her sister, he had requested her presence. Berengaria had sent a page in search of her. But nowhere in the palace could she be found. The archbishop, who until a few moments previous had been engaged with Agnes, now hastened to rejoin the queen; with no little alarm he questioned her concerning the absence of the young girl, but Berengaria, though equally anxious, could afford no clue to her mysterious disappearance. The archbishop bent his suspicious gaze upon the prince; but incapable of treachery, Malek Adhel failed to perceive the doubt thus cast upon his honor.

He himself in turn interrogated the queen, the archbishop, the members of the queen's household, with an anxiety which betrayed but too plainly the sentiment whence it sprung. Berengaria remembered that her sister had spent a few moments with her in the jasper saloon. Presently she vaguely recalled having seen her standing at the open casement leading into the rose-

garden: a clue was thus obtained; and with an expression of relief which quickly dispelled the gathering clouds from her fair face, the queen descended herself to the grounds to seek and bring back the truant.

But the prince reading her thought, quickly anticipated her intention. Overjoyed at the prospect of a private interview with the young princess, he flew like an arrow from the bow: hope and love bearing him company. Thoroughly acquainted with the intricacies of the forest labyrinth, he had threaded them in a few moments. At length he perceived the white garments of the novice among the dark-green foliage of the plantains. He slackened his steps now, as though he fain would enjoy with slow measure of content the delight of beholding her.

Matilda heard the sound of his approaching step. She saw and recognized him as he emerged from behind an intervening thicket, and the archbishop's story — the situation of the wretched Agnes, surged back with overwhelming force to her memory. In her terror she sprang to her feet and fled from him. But the timid dove whose innocent days have been spent within the narrow precincts of a confined space, has little chance of escape from the pursuit of the free-winged falcon. Secure of overtaking her at his will, Malek Adhel paused a moment to watch her graceful movements. Her avoidance — so novel to him, but inflamed his passion the more. Again he started in pursuit — he reached the fugitive— he touched her — he grasped her dress — he yearned to clasp her in his arms — and he dared not. If the ex-

quisite beauty of the young girl captivated his senses, the native dignity of her manner controlled them within bounds.

Influenced by impulses he had never tutored to restraint; supreme ruler, whose least wish none would presume to challenge; with no obstacle to the fulfilment of his desires save the feeble resistance of a young girl, a vague sentiment of reverence — such as he had never experienced save in the presence of his father or in the temple of Mahomet — thrilled his being; and with a sudden impulse he cast himself at Matilda's feet.

For the first time the haughty Moslem knelt to woman — and without shame.

"Oh, celestial being!" he cried in his rapture: "Thou who so changest my very nature; — daughter of Heaven, who surpassest the most radiant conception of my dreams; — thou who inflamest me with fires I dare not feed — for which I blush even in thy presence; — thou who already hast gained control of my will, my very being, — whence springs thy wondrous power? — To what divine source owest thou existence?"

But Matilda, with increasing alarm as this new language of passion was poured into her unwilling ears, only renewed her efforts to escape. Malek Adhel clasped her hand more closely, restraining her.

"Where would you go?" he cried passionately; "why so obdurate? What have you to fear? Why look upon me with such wild terror?"

Turning her face from his burning gaze, she answered him:

"God commands me te keep myself aloof from His enemies."

"And does this cruel God likewise require you to hate those who adore you?"

"I must hate those who do not acknowledge Him," she answered with an unwonted hesitation.

"No; a thousand times no!" the Saracen replied, snatching the princess' hand to his ardent lips. "You will not obey a cruel — an unjust law; you will share the flame which consumes me; you will give yourself to the lover who yields to you his destiny and his life! I swear to you that England shall behold you no more. Sooner would I die than lose you!"

His words seemed to arouse some dormant spirit within her. Snatching her hand from his detaining clasp she concealed it within the folds of her wide sleeves, and lowered the white band upon her forehead. Then, with haughty coldness she answered:

"I am the destined bride of Christ. It was to prepare myself for my exalted vocation that I journeyed toward Palestine, to worship at my Saviour's tomb. In England my cloister awaits me — thither my vows recall me. Retract, then, an oath which only an arbitrary force can accomplish. Leave me at liberty to return to my people, to my duty; and perhaps God to reward you will one day open your eyes to the light of the true religion."

In her firm resistance he recognized the steadfast faith and obedience of the true follower of Christ. He knew now as by intuition that to gain the heart of the

Christian princess he must first win her esteem, her trust in him. Already upon her happiness depended his own: to her every wish he determined to bend his mighty will.

"Incarnate purity," he said, "do with me as you will — in me behold your veriest slave: to please and to obey you I will do all things — suffer all things!"

Matilda was too pure of heart to appreciate the full extent of his self-denial. Yet she perceived that he had controlled himself only after a great effort of his will. Her heart was touched; her voice grew less repellent in its tones. With some degree of hesitation she gave him her first command — asked of him a first favor. She requested to be conducted to the queen.

The change in her did not escape the penetration of Malek Adhel. He perceived that only through the medium of the most delicate attentions and an entire acquiescence to the exactions of her maidenly reserve, could he hope ever to win to him this beautiful Christian; and he yielded implicit obedience to this, her first command. He indicated the path which led most directly to the palace. In silence she followed the prince. From time to time he would pause — and turn back to look at her with yearning eyes. Then the timid girl would recoil with reviving fear; her eyes would droop earthward, her delicate hand endeavor to shade her face from his burning gaze. But she was unable to conceal from his loving scrutiny the modest blushes which so enhanced her beauty.

Beholding her thus, so beautiful in her confusion,

the prince was fast losing self-control. But with an effort he once more gained the mastery over the instincts of his untutored nature.

Her beauty seemed to him at this moment as that of an angel.

Not over confident in his newly-acquired moral strength, Malek Adhel hastened his steps—realizing that one moment's madness might forever alienate from him the heart he was resolved to win. The struggle between a present impulse and hopes of future success was a violent one: but the sentiments at war within him were known to Malek Adhel, and he could cope with them successfully, while Matilda was agitated without knowing the cause of her agitation; and if a vague change had overshadowed her pure spirit, she perceived it only through the dim veil which innocence holds ever before a maiden's thoughts.

CHAPTER VIII.

Upon reaching the outskirts of the wood the prince and Matilda perceived the queen hastening forward to meet them. Nearer the palace stood the archbishop. His mien was grave almost to sternness.

With conscious confusion the young girl met the anxious inquiries of her sister, the silent scrutiny of William. There was much in her interview with the prince which maidenly reserve would not permit her to

reveal — and she was troubled at the thought of concealment. It seemed to her sensitive conscience that thoughts one dare not avow must of necessity be unworthy ones; and mistaking the shame of modesty for that of sin, she viewed in the light of a punishment an embarrassment she had never before experienced in the presence of her spiritual director.

But now that her fears were set at rest concerning her sister's disappearance, Berengaria's thoughts with sudden transition returned to their one engrossing theme.

She had had no opportunity to speak with the prince of Richard. Prëoccupied with his anxiety for Matilda, he would scarcely have listened had she been prepared to question him. Now she might hope to claim his attention.

"Have you no tidings to give me, Prince?" she said, coming to his side: "Oh, Malek Adhel, have you nothing to tell me of Richard?"

The prince was about to answer her when he observed a knight hastily coming towards them. Malek Adhel turned angrily to the queen.

"Who is this madman, madam, who presumes to enter your grounds at this hour without permission?"

The archbishop recognized Josselyn de Montmorency, and named him to the prince.

"This illustrious name," the latter rejoined, "has often reached me, emblazoned with a renown which kings well may envy. But the name, exalted though it may be, does not excuse the temerity of its possessor."

He advanced with rapid strides toward Josselyn.

"Presumptuous knight," he said haughtily, "are you not aware that it is forbidden to all men to enter these grounds without the express permission of the Queen of England? Has that permission been obtained? — and if not, how dare you intrude here?"

"Prince," replied Josselyn with a dignity which equalled that of the Saracen: "when Richard confided his wife and sister to the protection of the knights now prisoners in Damietta, we took oath to defend them to the last drop of our blood. Just now, on presenting myself at the palace, I found the household in commotion, and learned that the Princess Matilda had mysteriously disappeared since early morning. Strange rumors were rife of dangers which . . ."

"What dangers could overtake her here?" demanded Malek Adhel impatiently.

"It concerned me not to know; it was sufficient to suspect their existence. I came hither to defend her at all costs."

Malek Adhel was touched by the young man's determined loyalty.

"Brave Montmorency," he said, offering his hand, which the other as cordially accepted: "fear nothing; the queen will doubtless pardon your offence in view of the motive which prompted it. But learn that I am a knight as well as yourself. Hugh of Tiberias bestowed the spurs of chivalry upon me. In his presence I vowed to defend beauty, innocence, and misfortune at the hazard of my life. Be no longer anxious concerning the Princess of England. It is I who henceforth shall

watch over her — I, only, mark you! While giving full credit to your own courage and prowess, I believe my own will prove quite as efficient in her service; and at the feet of the fair Matilda, in presence of her sister — of this holy prelate — and of yourself, I do request that she will deign to regard me, hereafter, as her most devoted knight and sole defender."

"I doubt," responded Montmorency vehemently, "captive though she be in this palace, whether the daughter of a race of kings will deem it befitting to accept as her knight him who restrains her from liberty and happiness!"

"Nor may a Christian maiden place an infidel in this relation towards herself," added the archbishop.

"Nor a sister, him whose object it is to seek her brother's life," added the queen: "Oh! generous prince, consider yourself whether such acceptance would not be monstrous in the sight of Heaven!"

"And if I swore to you, madam," Malek Adhel answered, "never to turn my arms against a brother and husband so beloved: if I pledged myself to watch over his safety, to respect, in short, the brother of Matilda as I do my own — at this price would you give consent that your sister should grant the boon I crave?"

Berengaria could scarce credit the evidence of her senses. She could not believe that this invincible warrior would not only spare her husband's life, but would risk his own even in his defence. But Malek Adhel, perceiving the consent beaming in her eyes, hovering

upon her lips, renewed, with the eloquence of hope, his petition and his promises.

The queen at last yielded; more — she uttered words beseeming the woman and the wife rather than the queen of the haughty Richard; words of gratulation for a captivity which had been the means of allowing her an opportunity to influence Malek Adhel in her husband's favor.

"Will your majesty pardon me," interrupted Montmorency, no longer able to contain his indignation, "but surely Richard of England would be in no wise pleased to behold his royal consort invoking for him the generosity of Malek Adhel. However great the valor of the Saracen prince, I mistake much if the illustrious Richard would not fear his pity much more than his arms; and all our Christian knights, madam, would be vastly astonished to see a Christian queen place less confidence in their loyalty than in the protection of their greatest enemy."

Matilda, dropping her head upon the queen's shoulder, whispered that Montmorency spoke wisely and well. Malek Adhel heard her and was troubled; her gaze fell beneath his beseeching eyes; while Montmorency, on bended knee, gazed upon her with an enthusiasm tempered by reverence, and thanked her for the approbation she had deigned to bestow upon him.

At this sight Malek Adhel restrained with difficulty the terrible suspicions which suddenly beset him. Could it be that Montmorency had already won the heart of the princess? A thousand mad plans prompting him to

rid himself of his rival, suggested themselves to his jealous mind. Assuredly such presumption must receive its penalty — but such penalty as only Malek Adhel's great soul knew how to inflict.

"Montmorency," he said, "a spirit brave and true as yours must pine and fret in its captivity. I rend your chains. Rejoin your comrades, and tell them I fear them not, since I dare to restore you to them."

Josselyn was amazed; he could not bring himself to receive a favor from an infidel; he could not consent to leave Matilda. He refused the liberty proffered him. He had sworn to Richard to remain with the princesses, and, unless released by their wishes, at the cost of his life he must keep his oath.

Malek Adhel ingenuously asked the queen whether she was opposed to Montmorency's being the bearer of tidings from her to Richard. Berengaria assured him she should consider herself selfish in depriving Richard, and the cause, of so brave a comrade. Josselyn had but one remaining hope; he addressed himself to the princess; he implored her not to send him from her; would she thus reward, he asked, the fidelity which would induce him joyfully to lay down his life for the guerdon of her smile?

The impetuous Saracen could no longer contain himself. He, too, bent his haughty knee before her.

"Matilda," he cried, "I vow to you a devotion pure and unselfish, a gratitude without bounds; reflect upon the immense claims which the name of your knight gives you over me: think of the benefits my obedience will

permit you to confer upon your people, your friends, your brother!"

He ceased speaking, and in silence awaited the princess' reply. Montmorency also waited, and both regarded her with eager, beseeching eyes. Matilda's blue eyes sought the ground; confusion, emotion, indecision, were visible in turn upon her ingenuous countenance. She could not decide; and full of misgivings of her own judgment, she had recourse to the wisdom of the archbishop. "Direct me, Father," she said: "tell me what it is best that I should do!"

"My daughter," replied William; "the sword of Montmorency is too useful to the furtherance of our cause for it to be proper in you to retain him here, but if duty urges you to release him from his oath, it also compels you to refuse the services of a prince who, however great and magnanimous he may be, is still the most formidable enemy of your brother and of your God. My child," he added earnestly: "what need have you of man's help? Keep ever pure and fervent the faith that now governs your life, and, notwithstanding your sex and your extreme youth, you will be armed with a strength beyond the power of man to resist."

"Your words are full of wisdom and truth, my father," answered the young girl; "I accept them as my guide."

Then turning to Josselyn with a touching dignity, she said to him:

"Baron of Montmorency, the path which leads to glory is open to you. I will not detain you; rejoin our

army; go, shed your blood for a great and holy cause—the cause of God. You will relate our misfortunes to my brother; you will request the prayers of the Christians for our safe deliverance, but," she added blushing, "you will, to reassure them, tell them of the ennobling qualities of him who holds us in captivity. It will be easy for you to depict them — for a Montmorency to speak of loyalty and honor, is to speak his native tongue."

At these kindly words of praise Josselyn felt himself moved almost to womanish tears; to hide his emotion he bowed the knee before the princess and pressed the hem of her garment to his lips; then lowering his visor he bowed low before the queen, saluted the prince and the archbishop, and hastily moved away.

After his departure Malek Adhel remained thoughtful and preoccupied. The queen, weary of his silence, seated herself on a rustic bench, with Matilda beside her. In the meantime William was reflecting how best to obtain from the prince the liberty of Amaury's daughter; he feared to intrude upon Malek Adhel's revery, yet he was still more loth to put off for the morrow what could be done to-day: rëassured by the spirit of charity which reigned supreme in the heart of this wise and good man, he resolved to speak; he depicted to the prince the remorse of Agnes — the desire she experienced to expiate her crimes in a cloister by penance and prayer until relieved by death; he dared to hope that Malek Adhel would not oppose the only means of

redemption left a sinner who had been guilty only for his sake.

The prince, astonished, demanded what knowledge he possessed of Agnes' place of concealment.

It was Berengaria who then spoke; she informed the prince of the means through which Agnes had effected her escape from the seraglio, and ended by requesting her liberty at his hands.

"Since the princess has chosen so illustrious a protector, madam," answered Malek Adhel, "I place her liberty and her fate in your hands. Father of the Christians," he added, addressing the archbishop, "you know full well, that it was not I who seduced Agnes. She was too beautiful to allow me to refuse her proffered love, but I admired her character too little to bestow my own upon her in return: a woman whom I had beheld amidst the carnage of the battle-field, unmoved by the bloodshed of her fellow-creatures, could never have touched my heart. 'Tis to timid and modest beauty, to a pure and virtuous being alone, that my heart surrenders; 'tis to . . ."

The archbishop hastened to interrupt the avowal which hovered upon the lips of Malek Adhel. "My lord," he said: "what decision have you taken as regards the fate of Amaury's daughter?"

"Madam," the prince replied, addressing Berengaria, "as I have said, I resign to you all claim upon her; watch over her, henceforth you are her only support, her only shield; she has just lost her sister—Sibyl is no more . . ."

"What say you!" exclaimed the archbishop; "Sibyl is no more? What will become of Lusignan? What resource is left him now that he has lost his wife through whom alone he claimed the crown of Jerusalem?"

"I believe," interposed Malek Adhel smiling; "that my brother's valor has relieved him of it still more effectually."

He then added some details about the situation of the Christians. He informed them that the loss of Sibyl had not rendered Lusignan any the wiser; that he still insisted upon being regarded as King of Jerusalem; but that his pretensions, although approved by Richard, would not therefore meet with more success. He spoke also of the dissensions which had arisen between the King of England and Philip-Augustus, and of the various factions which divided the camp of the Crusaders.

The archbishop sighed bitterly over his brother's misfortunes and errors; and he took courage to request the prince's permission to charge Montmorency with such written counsels as would be most apt to restore peace among the Crusaders.

The prince could not refuse the request of a man for whom he entertained so profound a veneration; he even apologized for not granting more than was asked of him.

"I might allow you to depart with Montmorency," he said to him; "but I know so well the superiority of your genius, and the influence of your wisdom, that I dare not ignore their effect upon the minds of the

Christians; would it not be sheer treachery towards my brother to bestow upon you the means to settle their differences — differences so conducive to our success?"

William was too sensible of the justice of this remark to contend against it. Besides, Matilda seemed to him in such danger that had he been free to leave her on the spot, he would still have hesitated to accept. From the moment of her return with Malek Adhel he had several times regarded her with earnest scrutiny, without having been able to trace upon her ingenuous countenance the sweet serenity, the peaceful calm which had heretofore characterized it. He was impatient to question her upon the subject of her interview with the prince, and signed to her to follow him. The queen, impatient to pour forth to her husband minute accounts of her love and her sufferings, also requested of the prince permission to retire. Malek Adhel saluted Berengaria, accompanied her to the door of the palace and, following Matilda with lingering gaze, took his departure.

Berengaria hastened to shut herself up in her cabinet; and the princess, going towards the oratory, was agitated upon finding herself accompanied by the archbishop. Wishing, yet fearing, to confess to him the faults for which she reproached herself, scarcely had they reached the privacy of the oratory when the young girl throwing herself upon her knees before the archbishop, exclaimed:

"What blind presumption, oh, my father, has impelled me to forsake my cloister's peaceful seclusion to

come hither to acquire knowledge so fatal to the peace of other days! What does it profit me to know that among Christians are crimes whose existence I once ignored; and among Infidels, virtues I should never have credited them with possessing!"

"My daughter," replied William, "Providence sometimes permits an idolater to be adorned with the most brilliant qualities in order to show the vanity of worldly accomplishments when unaccompanied by faith, and if on the other hand, this same Providence permits that his children should fall from grace, 'tis but for the manifestation of the power of religion, which through the blood of Christ can redeem the veriest sinner. But why this change in you, my child?—Why these questions? What emotions disturb your habitual serenity? The blush of shame reddens your brow; what thoughts have power to bring it there?"

The princess buried her face in the priest's robes and between sobs and tears answered:

"Father, the Saracen surprised me in the gardens—he told me that he loved me—he dared to carry my hand to his impure lips; in my bewilderment I did not at first snatch it from his clasp; and when I bethought me after awhile, Father, I released it without experiencing the sense of horror that should have been mine."

Listening to her confession, the archbishop took care not to evince severity towards the penitent; he questioned her adroitly, sounded her heart through its inmost recesses and discovered with surprise traces of a

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recent emotion, of which he could not but acknowledge within himself Malek Adhel was the author. Nevertheless, if a sentiment of regard towards the prince had indeed dawned upon her virgin heart, it was so faint that it gave William but slight anxiety; aware of the power of his influence over Matilda, instead of informing her of his suspicions, and thereby giving additional color to their source, he preferred she should ignore the possibility of a Christian maiden loving an Infidel.

When Matilda regained her chamber Agnes was no longer there. Malek Adhel had ordered her to occupy a room near Berengaria, with express commands that she should quit it only with the queen, and the princess was but too well pleased to be restored to the privacy she had so cheerfully relinquished in the name of Christian charity.

CHAPTER IX.

THE supremacy which the image of the Princess of England held in the heart of the young Saracen, became day by day more powerful; constantly engrossed by one thought, he no longer took part in the pleasures he was once so eager to pursue; the cares of his high position no longer claimed his undivided attention; his rest was broken by thick-coming hopes and fears, and when he slept, love seemed still to hover above his pillow, coloring his disturbed dreams. Even in the

council chamber, or while reviewing his troops, the prince, forgetting all save the one object of his aspirations, would become absorbed in a revery so profound that he neither saw nor heard what was passing around him.

Often he would repair to the wood where he had surprised the princess; there, recalling the beauty, the movements, the looks of the young girl, his thoughts would take more passionate form; his heart would beat wildly beneath his coat of mail; his pulses throb in sympathy with the hot torrent coursing through his veins, and, yielding to the mad impulse, he would resolve to go to the princess, and compel her to be his; then, suddenly, he would seem to see her tears, to hear her beloved voice calling down upon him the wrath of her God; and at the thought of her indignation, her despair, his passionate impulse would retreat abashed, and a tender reverence come and hover about the fair image of his thoughts.

The more he loved, the less he presumed; he could not conceal from himself that the reserve of manner which the princess always maintained towards him, repelling his advances, was precisely that which rendered her so lovely and so dear to him.

And so the days sped by, bringing him scant comfort. In vain he presented himself each day at the palace of the Queen of England. The princess never appeared with her sister. Several times he enquired the cause of her absence. He was ever compelled to accept the same reply: In accordance with the re-

quirements of the vows she was about to take upon herself, Richard's sister was not permitted to appear before men.

Such obstacles but increased the passion of Malek Adhel, and one day, when alone with the queen, he gave free vent to his feelings. He assured her that he would no longer submit to disappointment. That if in the future he were denied access to the Princess Matilda, he would no longer be answerable for his actions; and instead of a kind and considerate master he should, perhaps, become a cruel and implacable tyrant.

"This young girl," he exclaimed with emotion, "has changed my entire being. She exercises a supreme control over me. What manner of pride is hers which disdains to ask aught of me who so gladly would grant all. Think, madam," he continued, urged by a sudden inspiration; "think how much you could obtain through the intercession of the princess. In releasing you without Saladin's orders I should doubtless risk my life; but what joy for me, if Matilda demanded the sacrifice!"

Berengaria did not listen unmoved; the thought of being restored to her husband thrilled her with inexpressible delight, but she was too candid to awaken false hopes in the prince; she permitted herself only expressions of earnest sympathy in his disappointment, since difference of religious opinions had placed an insurmountable barrier between her sister and himself.

Berengaria was keenly sensitive to the sorrows of

others; yet in pitying those of the prince she thought of her own, and asked his sympathy in return; she spoke of her beloved Richard, and confessed that if her return to him depended solely upon Matilda's intercession, it would be no fault of hers if it were not offered him. Malek Adhel asked no more; he had gained his point.

The queen went immediately to the princess; she found the archbishop with her, and related to them all she had just heard. They might be free, she said. Malek Adhel consented to rend their chains, to restore them to Richard; and asked in return for so much, only one word — one little word, from Matilda. "For he loves her," she added, "he loves her with a devotion and respect not unworthy our noblest knights."

Her words disturbed the maiden; a burning blush suffused her white brow; she dropped her meek eyes and humbly accused herself for having inspired a son of Mahomet with love.

Berengaria chided her excessive austerity, justified the prince, and declared that far from meriting censure, he was deserving of praise; since, possessing full power to abuse his authority over them, he denied himself that which he had the right to claim; and had treated them with a moderation of which no Mahometan prince, and perhaps few Christian ones, would have been capable.

At these words William interrupted her, asking in a somewhat severe tone what hopes of happiness she could possibly found upon so unworthy a love.

"Father," she argued, "if my sister could but overcome her repugnance to the prince, only to ask of him our liberty—only to see him once more—he has sworn to refuse her nothing!"

William reflected a moment, then answered gravely:

"The princess having accepted my spiritual guidance, I declare to your Majesty that as long as she honors me with her confidence, and is mistress of her actions, she shall not remain one instant with the infidel who has dared to cast his profane eyes upon her. I would tell you more, madam, were it not that I respect the pure and sacred ignorance of this young girl whose life is consecrated to God."

The queen, accustomed to a blind obedience to the decisions of the archbishop, did not presume to contradict him in this, nor did she further press Matilda to grant an interview to the prince; but in her heart she could not accept William's views on the subject and even dared to see in them more obstinacy than reason.

The next morning Malek Adhel did not fail to visit the queen at an early hour; drawing a favorable augury to his request, from the kindness of manner with which she had received his complaints the previous day. But meeting disappointment, he reproached her bitterly and announced that henceforward he should treat his prisoners with the same rigorous severity they used towards himself.

"And since they refuse not only to see me," he cried bitterly, "but to listen to the tidings I bring them, and to the propositions I have to make, I shall maintain

a profound silence; and others besides myself shall suffer the anguish of being deprived of the presence of the loved one."

"Alas!" said Berengaria weeping, "where then is your boasted justice — where the magnanimity with which all the world accredits you? Will you punish me for another's fault? Must my fate hang upon my sister's decision?"

"I have said it, madam; your fate depends entirely upon your sister. I can do much for you, but I will not act until I have seen and spoken with Matilda."

"Ah," cried the queen impulsively, "as long as the archbishop is near we can hope for no influence over her."

"And is it the priest who prejudices her against me?" questioned Malek Adhel, as though struck with a sudden light.

"Prince," replied the queen, "William possesses wisdom, experience, and a sincere piety; he knows that my sister has renounced the world, and that in order that the sacrifice be agreeable to the Lord it must be offered without a pang of regret; perhaps he fears that exposed to the dangers of your frequent presence, our innocent Matilda might carry to her cloister a too vivid remembrance of the enemy of her God."

Malek Adhel waited to hear no more; he resolved to send the archbishop from Damietta. But where? To another city — a slave? He could not resign himself to the thought. Love, in arming him against all obstacles could not render him unjust. Should he send him to the camp of the Crusaders? Prudence forbade,

but generosity approved; and generosity ever conquered prudence in the soul of Malek Adhel; besides, if he should act against his brother's interests in restoring to the Christians this eloquent apostle, would it not afford him additional pretext to defend that brother's rights with renewed ardor?

And arguing thus, he justified to himself that which but a few days previous would have seemed disloyalty. But 'twas love that now spoke to him; he listened to love alone.

Malek Adhel did not allow himself further reflection; he seemed to dread lest the voice of prudence should insist upon being heard; and he hastened to dispatch a messenger, requesting the presence of the archbishop.

"Pontiff of Christ," he said to him: "from tidings received from Saladin I have reason to believe that he will not restore the Queen of England to her husband until the Christians consent to raise the siege of Ptolemaïs. I know not whether Richard's private feelings will be allowed to influence his decision; your wisdom will be of invaluable service to him in this emergency, and in order to give him the benefit of your advice I tender you your liberty, and will send you back with Montmorency to the camp of the Crusaders. Inform Richard of Saladin's offer; if he accepts it I doubt not that his example will become authority to all the other sovereigns and that, consequently, it depends upon him to end a cruel war. But if Richard persists in his designs; if he prefers Ptolemaïs to his bride, then say to

him that I am ready to meet him, and that the same sword which overcame your armies at Tiberias will know how to drive them from before Ptolemaïs."

The pious prelate was surprised at this announcement. The prince's resolution seemed to him so sudden, so singular, that it awakened his suspicions. He crossed his arms over his chest, fixed his eyes upon the ground, and pondered in silence upon the possible motive of the prince in sending him to the camp of the Crusaders. It could not be, as he had said, to induce Richard to retire from before Ptolemaïs; the act would be so cowardly that to propose it would be an insult; and Malek Adhel must be very sure that Richard would rather suffer death than consent to it.

The archbishop could not doubt that this was a mere pretext to remove him from Damietta, and guessed but too well the motives which influenced the prince. But why restore him to liberty? Why permit him to return to his people? Could he not as readily send him a prisoner elsewhere? Must Malek Adhel's very errors be impregnated with magnanimity? Ah, this passionate love, which could induce him to commit an imprudence, but not an act of cruelty, alarmed the archbishop much less by its violence than by a certain grandeur of soul mingling with it and increasing its seductive influence. No, 'twas impossible; he could not consent to desert his tender lamb in such imminent peril; he would remain, to sustain and enlighten her upon the pitfalls and snares that beset her unwary path.

While he reflected, Malek Adhel impatiently awaited

his reply; but after awhile, finding the archbishop still absorbed in his thoughts, the prince could refrain no longer and urged him to speak.

"You would err," said the archbishop, "to suppose that Richard's affection for his queen could ever induce him to commit the cowardly and shameful act which you propose to him; to deliver her from your hands he would shed his blood to the last drop, but for the good of his country and his religion he would sacrifice even the life of this beloved wife; such is Richard, such are all our Christian princes; and I declare to you that were there a possibility of their entertaining the propositions with which you would charge me, I would use all my influence over them to make them blush for the base thought. No, prince, no; such a mission as this is not meet for a priest of peace, since it can but serve to reanimate hostilities in a yet more cruel form. It is more Montmorency's part than mine to . . ."

"It is nevertheless you to whom I shall commit the mission," interrupted the prince imperiously; "and this very evening you will depart with the caravan which accompanies Montmorency as far as the camp of the Crusaders. I will give orders that you shall be surrounded with the same honors and respect which I have myself accorded you; but I will not allow you to remain another day in Damietta — and I will be obeyed."

The decided tones of Malek Adhel left William nothing further to hope for; he forbore from a useless resistance, sighed deeply, bowed with cold formality to the prince, and hastened to rejoin the Princess of England.

"My child," he exclaimed, "I have but an instant to speak to you. May the good God watch over you; place all your trust in Him, for if He withholds from you His support you are lost. Malek Adhel fears my vigilance and sends me from you."

"What, Father, you will leave me!" cried Matilda alarmed.

"The day of tribulation has come, my daughter," said William vehemently; "we must meet it firmly; these tests to which He puts you are but proofs of His love. Oh, thou, sanctified unto Christ, forget not it is here He suffered for you; that the very ground you tread is soaked with the blood of His martyrs; that these surrounding deserts are peopled with the followers of the true faith; may so many illustrious examples teach you never to hesitate at the sacrifice of your life to save what is more precious far, your honor."

"Alas, Father," said the young girl weeping, "I do not comprehend your warning; pray enlighten my understanding. What have I to fear? What shall I do?"

"My child," replied the venerable prelate, "there is no longer time for concealment; hitherto you have pursued heavenward the easy path of innocence; now God calls you unto Him by the rough but glorious road of virtue, and He commands me to enlighten your ignorance. This Saracen, my child, has conceived for you a criminal passion; this Infidel, inflamed with an adulterous lust, wishes to number you among his wives — you, daughter of kings, Christian virgin, bride of Christ! You shudder, my child; you feel yourself already pol-

luted at the mere thought of such abominations! Oh, noble maiden, take courage, for courage can save you; repulse with scorn the Saracen who has dared to lift his profaning eyes to you; and, I repeat, prepare to die, if it must be, for God will be nigh, and Heaven will open to receive the martyr's redeemed spirit!"

The priest's vehement words inspired the timid girl with terror; already she imagined herself surrounded by devouring flames and abysmal pitfalls; bewildered, frightened, beside herself with alarm, the greater for its very vagueness, she threw herself on her knees before the archbishop, burying her white face in his robes, sobbing piteously:

"Oh, my Father, forsake me not!"

"My child," replied the archbishop compassionately, "I have already told you that the impious Mahometan dreads my vigilance; but in striving unaided against the snares of the Devil your glory will be but the greater. However, should you become conscious of weakness beyond your own control, ask, obtain from the prince permission to make a pilgrimage toward the Great Desert; there, among the ruins of a monastery founded by Saint John Chinaque, resides a pious anchorite. Formerly the world beheld him surrounded by the highest honors, celebrated for his extensive knowledge, solving the great mysteries of the heavens and the earth. But the more he tasted of worldly honors, the more conscious he became of their hollowness. He perceived that man, gifted with the rarest intelligence and unsustained by faith in God,

raises himself above his fellow-creatures but to achieve a greater fall in the end; and so he refused the fallacious light which showed him only the weaknesses of humanity, to attach himself solely to the one light which leads to its glory. He retired to the desert; for thirty years he has lived there alone, spending his days in fasting, prayer, and the practice of hospitality. Lean upon him should you falter, he will sustain you; request his prayers—they know the surest road to heaven . . ."

The entrance of Berengaria interrupted the archbishop's discourse. She had just been informed of his departure and came to inquire its cause. The archbishop informed her of the pretext of which the prince had made use in order to remove him from Damietta.

"Good God!" exclaimed the queen; "is it possible that Saladin requires for my ransom my husband's shame! He dares to propose to him to raise the siege of Ptolemaïs! it is at this price only he will restore me to liberty? Ah, if such be his resolve, I may well die, for I shall never more behold my beloved Richard."

The archbishop, moved with pity for her grief, seated himself beside her, endeavoring to console her by the assurance that Malek Adhel in giving him the mission had not positively ascribed it to Saladin. But the queen scarcely heeding him, despairingly asserted her resolution to die rather than purchase life or its equivalent, liberty, at the cost of her husband's honor.

"But let him know at least," she added weeping bitterly, "let him know that I do not die alone. I bear in my bosom a pledge of his love — the heir of his

name and throne. Oh, must this child, too, perish! will they not have mercy upon so tender a victim?"

At Berengaria's confession the archbishop bowed with respectful deference before her. "Illustrious and unhappy queen," he said, "do not despair: Providence watches over you; He tests but will not desert you. Believe me, you will one day return to England and present to your court the august scion of the great Henry II. In awaiting the fulfilment of time, cheer up your drooping spirits; remember that you can no longer yield to despair without sinning against God and your husband. And to your care, Matilda, I consign the queen; surround her with attentions and comforts; refuse her nothing, consistently with your duties elsewhere, sacrifice to her all the earthly desires you may cherish; God will reward you with usury. I can say no more — time speeds, and ere I depart I shall endeavor to obtain Agnes' consent to accompany me, for I shall believe in her salvation only when she is far hence. Farewell, unhappy princesses; may Heaven's choicest blessings be yours; and amid your severest trials remember that an omnipotent God watches over you."

Lifting his hands in benediction above the bowed heads of the two desolate women, the venerable prelate left them, his eyes dimmed with sorrow, his heart full of compassion and anxiety.

CHAPTER X.

THE archbishop went to the apartments occupied by Amaury's daughter to propose her immediate departure, desiring to remove her as soon as possible from surrounding temptations.

"If you are afraid to show yourself in the camp of the Christians," he said, "we will stop at the monastery founded by Saint Helena on the summit of Mount Carmel; there you will be received by holy women, who lead stainless lives, subjecting themselves to the most severe penances, and who live, nevertheless, in a humiliation so abject that it would never occur to them to consider themselves superior to you, nor to remember your errors save while petitioning Heaven for their forgiveness. In this retreat, Agnes, you may expiate in sackcloth and ashes the crimes of your past life, and endeavor to regain your forfeited place in the approbation of your Heavenly Father."

At the archbishop's first words the Princess of Jerusalem had shuddered, and burning blushes suffused her face; but when he ended she turned from him with proud disdain, vouchsafing no reply.

"Beware Agnes," said the prelate after waiting patiently a moment, "harden not your heart; the evil of obduracy is even greater than that of sin."

"Father," cried the unhappy woman with an agitation she could no longer control, "leave me, I im-

plore you; I cannot, no, I cannot yet repent; my heart has room for only one thought — vengeance!"

"Well, Agnes," replied the archbishop, "if you must have blood; if vengeance be necessary to a soul so animated by hatred and violence, I shall no longer oppose you. Come, follow me to the camp of the Crusaders; join your fierce courage to the zeal of our army; resume your lance and sword, cover yourself with the blood of the Infidel . . ."

"Certainly I will!" she cried vehemently; then suddenly restraining herself, she added more quietly: "but the hour has not yet come; I shall await it here, my Father, I will not go with you."

"Listen, unhappy woman;" the archbishop compassionately persisted: "your crimes are so great that if Divine mercy were not inexhaustible I could never promise you forgiveness; but so boundless is that mercy that it surrounds, envelops you wherever, whatever you may be; it awaits but a word, a wish of sincere repentance, to shed upon you its inestimable blessings. Oh, Agnes, is your heart impregnable to so much love?— Do not wound me with your silence my child!"

Amaury's daughter still remained impassible. The archbishop fell upon his knees. "Oh, my God," he cried, "deign to inspire her with pity for herself. Thy pardon awaits her; compel her hardened heart to implore it of Thee!"

Agnes was still silent. William's venerable face was bathed in tears as he gazed at her.

"And thus," he said, brokenly, "while the remembrance of your crimes remains, an indelible stain, in the world you shall have left, you will suffer throughout eternity in those regions where alone God's forgiveness enters not."

Agnes involuntarily shuddered at these words; but by a fretful gesture of impatience she intimated that she would hear no more.

William, perceiving how futile for the present were any further attempts to reclaim the erring creature, turned away. At the door he paused once more, and with his gaze fixed pleadingly upon Agnes' obdurate countenance he sought some sign — a word, a tear, betokening repentance, that he might grant her pardon. But Agnes gave no token; and raising her hand in dismissal or farewell, she turned her face from him with a haughty disdain which destroyed all hope in the worthy prelate's breast.

The archbishop then departed to join the little caravan awaiting him beyond the eastern gate of Damietta. He found with Montmorency several Christian captives, who having paid their ransom had taken advantage of this opportunity to enter the service of the first Christian baron, and to follow him into Syria. Their party was still further increased by the addition of a number of pilgrim monks who intended embarking at Tyre for Europe; the remainder of the caravan was composed of Mussulman soldiery entrusted with their safe conduct, and such was the extent of Malek Adhel's hold upon their obedience that not one

of them failed in the attentions and respect their master had exacted of them towards the Christians under their protection.

The party wended their way along the shores of the Mediterranean, that the sea-breeze might lessen the extreme heat arising from the burning sands of Suez. All the cities which they passed had fallen under the dominion of Saladin; and there was not one, particularly in Syria, but showed vestiges of the ancient splendor of the Christians; not one whose ruined churches, broken altars, and prostrate crosses, did not reveal the names of its former masters. At the sight of these revered relics, overthrown and dragged through the mire, the pious archbishop sighed sorrowfully; Josselyn trembled with indignation; and while the former invoked Divine aid for the reconquest of these beautiful cities by the followers of His faith, the other swore upon his trusty sword one day to regain them. They beheld in the various ports active preparations for the destruction of the Christian fleet; at this sight the young French knight could scarcely contain the warlike valor which animated him; forgetting alike his chains and his isolation, he would fain have drawn his sword against the enemies of his faith had not William's prudence restrained his impetuous rashness; then restoring the half-drawn sword to its scabbard with a scornful impatience he could not overcome, he would endeavor to control his impulses until opportunity should offer a successful issue to his arms.

Often, too, had William's wise influence induced

him to conceal the passionate fervor with which the very name of the Princess of England inspired him. His love was not that which man ordinarily feels for woman; to him she was something more divine than human; no earthly desire dared profane the worship he gave her: to compare Matilda with the angels seemed to him to give them the highest meed of praise.

After several days' march, having passed successively Gaza, Jaffa, Cæsarea, and Ascalon, they perceived in the distance Mount Carmel rearing its rock-bound front, crowned with the famous monastery which bears its name; and amid the vast plain which separates it from Ptolemaïs, their delighted gaze at last distinguished the banners of the Cross floating above the camp of the Crusaders.

At this sight the heart of the venerable archbishop was filled with unspeakable joy; he stretched his arms towards his brethren, blessing them afar off, and oblivious of the feebleness of old age, hastened his steps towards the longed-for goal. Montmorency alone accompanied him; the rest of the caravan followed more slowly.

Presently the advance guard of the Crusaders, perceiving in the distance a troop of Mussulman soldiers, and nearer a priest and a warrior attentively examining the camp as they approached, suspected treachery; and fearing a surprise, sounded the alarm.

The camp was instantly in commotion; the Crusaders hastily arming themselves, rushed to the front; as they reached the intrenchments they beheld the

venerable Archbishop of Tyre, weary and travel-stained. Lusignan was the first to recognize him; rushing to meet him, he cried:

"Do my eyes deceive me; is it indeed you, holy father, who come to restore peace and union amongst us?"

While he was speaking Montmorency had already thrown himself at the feet of Philip Augustus. The king received him with much kindness, clasped him to his heart, and gave every evidence of his joy at regaining the most valiant support of his throne.

Richard still more deeply moved grasped the archbishop's hand, gazing intently at him without daring to ask a question. But William, appreciating his anxiety, did not keep him long in suspense.

"Fear nothing, great king," he said; "'tis but a few days since I parted from your wife and sister; they are in perfect health. I left them in Damietta, under Malek Adhel's protection."

"Are they treated as slaves?" Richard asked hastily.

"They could not even in their palace in Great Britain be surrounded with greater honor and respect. But," added William, "the details of their situation, the object which has brought me here, and the explanations I shall presume to ask of you, will be the themes of many conferences; at the present time my first thought must be to solicit your care for the Mussulman soldiers who accompanied us hither. Permit them to go to Ptolemaïs; 'tis a favor I promised to obtain for them, and will be a worthy recompense for their generous conduct while escorting us from Damietta."

The archbishop's request was greeted with unanimous approval; several Christian soldiers even desired the privilege of accompanying the Saracens to the gates of Ptolemaïs; and mutually appreciating this interchange of courtesies, they seemed during the short route more disposed to assist each other like brothers than to do battle as enemies.

In the meantime the arrival of the archbishop and Montmorency had caused joy throughout the camp of the Crusaders; to all the archbishop's presence appeared to herald union and concord; enmities seemed to hide their humiliated heads at his approach, and so great was the confidence he imparted to all within the scope of his influence that faith, and hope of success, sprang to life in their hearts ere he had spoken. He requested Richard to summon a general council for the following morning; then passing through the camp amid acclamations of enthusiastic delight, he went to seek rest in the tent of Richard of England; while Montmorency accompanied Philip Augustus to his own tent, greeted with shouts of welcome and applause by the multitude who loved to do honor to their best beloved hero.

While awaiting the meeting of the council William was not idle; he busied himself in preparing the minds of the people for what he should hereafter tell them. He informed himself about the causes of the discord existing; he spoke in strong terms to Richard, and reproached Lusignan for the obstinacy which threatened the very empire; he even dared to remonstrate with Philip Augustus, saying that it was not for the purpose of

crowning a King of Jerusalem, but to conquer the holy city that he had come to the Orient; he spoke privately with the Duke of Bavaria who had commanded the Germans since the death of the Emperor Frederick, and obtained the support of Esmengard d'Aps, grand-master of the Hospitallers; in short, with a few words he gained complete influence over the Genoëse, the Flemish, the Templars, and the Knights of St. John.

Then, and then only, he sought repose; but not before he had thanked God before His altar for the hopes he had conceived, and asked of Him the gift of a rarer eloquence wherewith to move the hearts of the kings, and achieve the difficult and important work of restoring harmony among the disunited brethren of the Cross.

CHAPTER XI.

Scarcely had the dawn begun to crimson the eastern horizon when the archbishop directed his steps toward the council-chamber. Three thrones had been erected. One was occupied by Richard of England; the second by Philip Augustus, the third, belonging to the Emperor of Germany, remained, of course, vacant; the Duke of Bavaria, as representative of the deceased monarch, occupying a seat directly beneath it. Lower still were placed the electors of the empire, and the peers of France; the English barons

and the dignitaries of the church followed, according to their rank. The fourth side of the chamber was reserved for the Eastern noblemen; the princes of Antioch and of Galilee, the counts of Jaffa and of Tripoli, the knights of the Holy Sepulchre and those of the Teutonic order; in front of all were Lusignan and Conrad. Each of these two haughty rivals, occupying seats of equal elevation, appeared indignant at an equality which seemed to him an affront; and presented to the assembly the wonderful spectacle of two kings of Jerusalem disputing with fierce anger the possession of a kingdom where reigned a third.

Scarcely had the assembled sovereigns, crowned, sceptered, and robed in royal purple, taken their seats in silence, when the venerable Archbishop of Tyre with bared head and burning gaze arose.

He set forth with forcible eloquence the fatal results of the discords pervading the camp; he proved to his audience that they alone prevented the Christians from becoming masters of Ptolemaïs, and marching thence upon Jerusalem. He threatened with the vengeance of Heaven those who preferred temporal advantage to the advancement of Religion; he wounded their pride by showing them that their foolish dissensions had gained for them the ridicule of the Mahometans.

"Time and again," he added, "have I heard them say to each other: 'why have so many powerful kings dragged their subjects and their treasures here merely to encamp upon our ground, and remain in their intrenchments too timid to come forth!' Nor is this

all," continued William; "while you thus fritter away the most valuable time, the most favorable season, do you suppose that Saladin remains an idle spectator of your quarrels? Throughout the whole land he is gathering his troops; in all his ports he is equipping fleets; everywhere I found active and efficient preparations for war going on. With such force at hand, what doth Saladin await ere rushing upon and annihilating you?" Then, in tones low but distinct as the roll of distant thunder; with the gleam of the lightning-flash in his steel-grey eyes, the old man answered his own query:

"He awaits the interposition of an ally more powerful, more cruel than his armies; each day it advances upon you, carrying in its bosom thirst, famine, and pestilence; when the sign of Cancer is seen in the zodiac; when the dog days shed upon you their devouring heat; when the streams are dried up, and all vegetation, scorched and withered, falls to the parched and arid earth; when, unable longer to resist such an accumulation of ills, your weakened bodies are no longer able to support the weight of arms, *then* Saladin, like a destructive comet, will fall suddenly upon you; *then* the 'Lion of battles,' the terrible Malek Adhel, will wield his destructive weapon upon your defenseless ranks, mowing them down like reeds before the sweep of the tropical tornado. Of so many noble knights wearing sword in defence of the son of Mary, nothing will remain save — a little dust and much shame; and this camp where you still linger, this camp still filled with warriors and heroes, will become one vast cemetery,

reminding future nations only of the shame of your defeat, and the triumph of your enemies!"

So bold a sketch astonished the assembly. Every soul was moved; a petrified silence gave place to a low deep murmur like the growl of a wounded lion; Richard and Philip Augustus, sensible of the justice of the archbishop's remarks, but amazed at the slightest reflection upon their courage, started up with a simultaneous movement, vowing that if die they must, it should be in the midst of glorious battle. Lusignan seemed affected with grief, but no change was apparent upon the haughty countenance of the Marquis of Tyre; inflexible of purpose, proud of the possession of the only town in Palestine subject to Christian authority, he ranked himself above the kings surrounding him, defied the fate prophesied by the archbishop, and remained unmoved by his eloquent appeal.

William, however, perceiving that he had succeeded in arousing his auditors, now began to fear lest his representations had induced despair of success, rather than the energy it was his aim to impart. Resuming his theme, he demonstrated to them the incalculable advantages which would accrue from a general reconciliation.

"While the Saracens," he said, "believing you harassed by internecine quarrels, have ceased their watchfulness; while Saladin is still in Jerusalem, and Malek Adhel in Egypt, assemble your troops and sweep down upon your enemies like an overwhelming tornado which carries all before it! Pause not a moment; at

break of day to-morrow attack Ptolemaïs with your united forces; the eve will witness your triumphant entrance; the waning sun will gild the glorious banners of the Cross surmounting its dismantled walls!"

Warming with his theme, the archbishop depicted in vivid colors other triumphs which must follow the taking of Ptolemaïs; he showed them the infidels flying in despair before the victorious arms of the Christians, who, pursuing their relentless course, would clear the road to Jerusalem and become its masters ere Malek Adhel had time to reach his brother with fresh troops.

Like the inspired men of old who prophesied of things to come, William, filled with religious enthusiasm, portrayed to his audience the moment when the gates of Zion should fly open at their demand; when their hands, casting aside the implements of war, would be busied in rebuilding the Holy Temple; when with palms of victory they should strew the holy places where once the Saviour had shed his redeeming blood.

The hopefulness which inspired the archbishop infected his auditors to a man; there was but one will, one resolve; the partisans of Conrad, mingling with those of Lusignan, forgot all previous animosity, seeing only brothers-in-arms in those whom but an hour ago they had regarded as enemies.

Nevertheless, the prudent William was not satisfied with a reconciliation which, springing from the effervescing emotions of the moment, might not outlive them; he desired more solid foundation and, taking advantage of the mood of the assembly and of the as-

cendency he had gained over them, he once more solicited their attention.

"And now," he continued, "I unite with all these brave soldiers, these great captains, who are ready to shed their blood for the reconquest of the Holy City, in desiring to know to whom, under God, we are to render homage as king. Before me I behold two princes claiming the throne of Jerusalem; both sustained by illustrious protectors, seem to possess equal rights and equally invincible obstinacy. I am aware that the crown of Jerusalem belonged to Sibyl, and that dying without issue, she could transmit this precious heritage only to her sister Isabella, the wife of Conrad; it would seem then that the Marquis of Tyre should be regarded as the sole and legitimate possessor of the throne of Baudouin. Nevertheless, Lusignan, who was consecrated king by the unanimous will of his subjects, is still living, and I ask you sovereigns who hear me, can he be deprived save by death of this august title, this exalted rank? And while he who possesses them still exists, would the one who should rob him of them deserve any other name than that of usurper? I perceive, illustrious monarchs, that this truth does not appeal to you in vain; and as none of you would suffer this affront to Lusignan, none of you will permit him to endure it. However, in order to save Conrad from being deprived of the rights with which his marriage with Isabella has invested him, decide thus: during the term of life which Heaven has in store for Lusignan, let him alone be regarded by the Christians as King of Jerusa-

lem; but after his death, whether or not a second marriage affords him posterity, the throne shall none the less revert to Conrad and to his descendants."

This proposal was received with general acclamations, satisfying as it did the impatience which all experienced for a settlement of the question at issue, and the consciences of those who had given their promise of assistance to the respective claims of their favorites. Richard had vowed to place Lusignan upon the throne of Jerusalem; according to the arrangements proposed, his vow would be fulfilled; while Conrad had no cause to reproach Philip Augustus, since at the decease of Lusignan the possession of Palestine was decreed to him and to his descendants. Perhaps, in their inmost souls, the two haughty rivals were not quite satisfied; but carried away by the general voice of consent and perceiving that their most zealous adherents impatiently awaited their answer, they accepted the situation, and assented to the archbishop's proposition.

The kings and other magnates then rose and approaching a table upon which lay a Bible, placed their hands upon the holy Book and swore upon this token of their faith to religiously fulfil the articles proposed by the Archbishop of Tyre. This ceremony ended Richard exclaimed: "To-morrow we attack Ptolemaïs!"

"To-morrow we attack Ptolemaïs!" echoed Philip Augustus.

As these words, so pregnant with triumph, fell from the lips of the two greatest monarchs of the world, the assembly to a man responded with cries so enthusiastic

that they penetrated to the camp, where the soldiers, catching the warlike sound, and inspired with renewed ardor, rushed towards the council-chamber, the sooner to learn the results of the meeting.

They were speedily apprised that on the morrow, at break of day, they would be beneath the walls of Ptolemaïs and before set of sun must raise the standard of the Cross upon its ramparts. With one accord they swore to accomplish the work before them; counting obstacles as naught, they resolved to ignore impossibilities.

Before the assembly had dispersed Montmorency requested to be heard. All but he resumed their seats.

"Sovereigns and knights," he said, "the cause of God for which we have armed ourselves is assuredly the most important of all, but perhaps that of misfortune and of innocence should scarcely be less sacred to our hearts.

"Who amongst us does not grieve to behold the Queen of England in captivity, and Malek Adhel daring to demand for her ransom our disgraceful retreat? But who would not thrill with indignation to know that this same Malek Adhel, infatuated with the loveliness of the Princess Matilda, daily pollutes the ears of this saintly maiden with protestations of his guilty love? If until now he has found himself compelled to respect the daughter of kings, who knows but some day, wearied of a fruitless self-control, he.... I see you shudder at the bare suggestion, Sire," he added, addressing Richard, "and already your wishes meet

mine, in asking of this august assembly to fly with us to the succor of the illustrious princesses as soon as our arms shall have opened a passage for us to Damietta.

"Far be it from me, however, to require of the entire army to abandon victories in Palestine and march into Egypt; I desire only that all knights who have vowed to serve and defend beauty be permitted to join me in the rescue of the Princess Matilda, that we may restore her, pure and stainless, to worldly throne or the convent's seclusion, as Heaven may ordain."

"And if knightly vows alone entitle men to follow you on this mission," cried Philip Augustus impetuously, "what knight shall remain behind? Are not honor and beauty the device of all—even of kings? I swear to God that Damietta shall find me with you at its gates!"

"Sire," interrupted Richard, "we cannot both abandon the command of the army, and I think your majesty will not question my claim to go to the rescue of my wife and sister."

"And I," rejoined Lusignan, "shall celebrate my restoration to the throne of Jerusalem by first aiding and defending the unfortunate princesses; my arms, my life are at the disposal of the Princess Matilda, and I am proud to acknowledge that I would not hesitate to sacrifice even my throne in order to obtain her hand."

At this announcement Richard warmly clasped the hand of his brother-in-arms, and appeared already to yield consent. This compact did not escape Montmorency's notice; deeply wounded at witnessing the expression and reception of proposals his own modest

diffidence had prevented him from advancing, he haughtily responded:

"Lusignan, it would seem, has spoken without due reflection; he would scarcely choose to have it said of him that when he lost his throne he was at the head of his army, but was absent when it was regained for him."

Lusignan, offended by this taunt, wished to avenge himself on the instant; but the two kings interposed their authority and, assisted by William, succeeded in appeasing the resentment of the two knights. Then the proposition made by Josselyn was resumed, and it was decided that after the fall of Ptolemaïs a troop of a thousand men should be formed under the name and title of 'knights of the Virgin,' that Richard should lead them, and that Montmorency should be second in command under him; the rank of all other aspirants should be decided by lot, excepting Philip Augustus who must in the absence of Richard remain at the head of the army, and Lusignan, who could not consistently desert his kingdom at the moment it was being reconquered for him. The egotistical Conrad coarsely declared that a woman's honor was not worth the cost of a battle.

The general points of interest thus settled, the plan of attack for the morrow was next decided upon. Richard, at the head of the English and flanked by the Hospitallers and the Flemish, was to gain possession of the western tower; Philip Augustus that of Nazareth, rising southward; to Lusignan was assigned the charge of the heavy engines of destruction, constructed long

since for the purpose, which should be brought to bear upon the weaker points in the walls surrounding Ptolemaïs; Conrad, with a bitter smile, promised to support him.

In the meantime to prevent their preparations being observed by the enemy, the camp was surrounded by high palisades of olive trees. Disdaining rest, each chief issued his orders, prepared for battle, and gave himself up solely to warlike aspirations.

Scarcely had the twilight descended upon the earth when Montmorency with a thousand pioneers, taking advantage of the darkness, began noiselessly to undermine the outer walls of the city. Lusignan caused a wooden tower filled with missiles of war to be quietly rolled before a badly repaired breach; a corps of Tyrians advanced with battering-rams, ballistas, and other instruments of warfare, which they raised against the walls. All these arrangements were made with caution and in silence; never was carnival of death heralded with less noise and display. While these preparations for assault were going on among the Christians, the inhabitants of Ptolemaïs, reposing a blind confidence in the dissensions which had hitherto detained the Crusaders within their camp, were wrapped in peaceful slumber, wholly unconscious that the angel of death was advancing upon them—was already hovering over their heads.

Scarcely had the dawn dispelled the darkness of the night when they were awakened from their slumbers by the sound of trumpets, the clash of arms, and the neighing of horses; they rushed to the ramparts and beheld a

scene which filled them with consternation. The walls offered but a temporary protection as the foundations were being undermined by thousands of men. Hoping to interrupt the progress of the sappers and miners, the Mussulmans cast down upon them red-hot stones and boiling lead, but they were soon repulsed by the darts and arrows of the besiegers. They returned to the charge, commanded by the brave Metchoub to whom Saladin had entrusted the defence of Ptolemaïs, and opposed a firm and dogged obstinacy to the impetuous ardor of the Crusaders. Already several of their towers were dismantled, their moats filled in, and breaches made at various points; and although the Crusaders were about to storm, the besieged offered no sign or token of surrender.

Richard, irritated at their resistance, seemed inspired with redoubled zeal and encouraged his men by his own conspicuous daring and valor. Iron spikes, trenchant spears, the terrible battering-ram, were all brought to bear upon the western tower which soon trembled, tottered, and fell with a noise like thunder, carrying with it the warriors who defended it. Richard threw himself into the breach; he was master of the outer walls. For some time the Saracens disputed the ground with him, but finally perceiving that the Christians were victorious at all points they took refuge within their inner intrenchments. Philip Augustus, master of the tower of Nazareth, now rejoining Richard, they determined to give no respite to the enemy, but to prepare to escalade their second fortifications.

While thus following up their victory they learned with amazement that Montmorency had just achieved a greater triumph still; he had taken the port, and the forts protecting it, and opened for himself a passage, impossible to a less daring warrior, by the aid of suspension bridges which he had caused to be thrown from the ramparts to the inner walls of the town. He had to overcome but a small number of troops ere he would be master of the eastern division, and at liberty to rejoin the main body of the army.

He did not keep them long in suspense. Excepting the terrible arm of Malek Adhel, there was no power capable of resisting the impetuous onslaught of the young French knight. Scarcely had the sword of Richard and the lance of Philip Augustus begun to break through the inner fortifications before Montmorency was in their midst — to the fore. With his own hands he placed a ladder against the wall and was the first to lead the assault. Lusignan followed a short distance behind; inspired with the rivalry for glory, they braved with unexampled audacity the darts which rained upon their heads. Montmorency was the first to gain the citadel. He touched it with a victor's hand, and forgetting the dangers which threatened him, the enemies surrounding him, he cast away the shield which guarded his head and, snatching the standard of the Cross from the hands of his followers, planted it firmly upon the wall, thus signalizing to the Christians the triumph of their arms. Vainly the Saracens endeavored to overthrow it; the young hero defended his victory

with the same valor with which he had gained it. One moment they beheld him standing upright upon the edge of the wall, the next he had thrown himself into the inclosure and, placing himself before the wall where waved the sacred banner, armed only with his sword, menaced the Infidels, and held them at bay.

In the meantime the ladder, by means of which he had just scaled the wall, had fallen beneath the weight of the warriors who had followed in his wake and Montmorency found himself alone in the midst of the foe. Not alone — his courage engirded him, and he knew no fear. The Saracens, mortified at having suffered repulse at the hands of one man, rushed upon him, and while on one side his invincible arm met and overthrew his assailants, from the other he received a blow from a battle-axe which split his helmet in two, leaving his head bare and defenseless. At the sight of his youth and extraordinary beauty the Mussulmans, astonished by a valor which might well have been the proudest boast of riper years, seemed to recoil from dealing death to one whom they could not help admiring, but Metchoub recognized the hero and rushed forward in mad haste, shouting to his soldiers:

"Fools, why do you hesitate to strike? If Montmorency falls, Ptolemaïs may yet be saved!"

And followed closely by his men he reached the young Christian knight.

Montmorency, nearly overpowered by numbers, opposed to the torrent which threatened to overwhelm him an unflinching arm and a fearless heart; steadying

himself against the wall, he thought less of defending his life than of guarding the standard of the Cross floating above him. Already his blood began to redden his armor, when Heaven, wishing to preserve him to a world of which he was the glory and the example, sent him an ally. After having been several times repulsed, Lusignan followed by hosts of men at length succeeded in scaling the ramparts. He at once perceived Montmorency's critical situation and flew to his assistance; the Christians rushed after him and succeeded in extricating the young knight from the imminent perils which surrounded him.

Scarcely was Josselyn liberated when, forgetting his wounds, he cast aside his broken sword and appropriated the helmet of a fallen foe, and again sought the combat. Meanwhile Metchoub, furious at the escape of his prey, turned all his rage upon Lusignan and launched his spear at him with such sudden force that the King of Jerusalem had no time to ward it off. He received it in his breast, the blood spurted forth, the gallant soldier faltered and dropped upon his knee and Metchoub taunted him.

"Monarch of Jerusalem," he said, "since thou hast lost thy terrestrial kingdom, go seek one in Heaven . . !"

But Metchoub stopped abruptly. All the fortifications were carried — the entire army was in Ptolemaïs. Richard flew to the defence of his brother-in-arms, rescued and avenged him. Conqueror of Metchoub, he ordered him to be loaded with chains.

The inhabitants of Ptolemaïs, seeing their chief in

irons, submitted and accepted the terms of capitulation tendered by Philip Augustus.

Almost simultaneously the victorious Cross crowned the various mosques of the city and the glorious banners of Christendom floated upon the air; the setting sun gilded them with his parting rays and gleamed upon the triumphant arms of the victors as they marched through the conquered city.

Arm in arm the kings of France and of England marched at the head of their troops as they went to render thanks to the God of battles in the great church of St. John, where the Infidels had heretofore honored their prophet, and which the Christians now restored to its original worship.

The Archbishop of Tyre, in his pontifical robes, had accomplished the ceremony of purification. He now began that of worship, and the holy name of Christ resounded in chants of praise and thanksgiving throughout the temple. Monarchs, princes, knights, and soldiers, without distinction of rank or title, together in the presence of their God, bent reverent knee and humble head before His altars.

Having thus rendered homage where it was due, the conquerors retired to their respective quarters and sought the grateful repose which night offers to the weary after the exertions of the day.

CHAPTER XII.

WHILE Ptolemaïs was succumbing to the Christian forces, Saladin, relying upon the strength of his fortifications, the courage of his men, and still more upon the dissensions dividing the camp of the Crusaders, had marched towards Mosul with a portion of his army to defend it against the threatened attack of Emmaddin, its former ruler. A few days' fighting had enabled him to repulse him, and he was returning triumphant along the shores of the Orontes when at the foot of the mountains of Galilee he encountered Metchoub, deputed to treat for the ransom of the prisoners of Ptolemaïs.

The unfortunate warrior, his head covered with ashes, despair in his heart, prostrated himself at his master's feet.

"Take thou my life," he said humbly; "for thy enemies have surprised me, they have captured the city thou didst entrust into my hands and have obliged me to come and ask thee to sign the treaty of capitulation we have been compelled to make with them."

At such dire and unexpected tidings Saladin seemed like one struck dumb. He could not believe, he could not comprehend how the eloquence of one man could have succeeded in appeasing the implacable discords that reigned within the Christian camp, nor how one day could have sufficed to render them masters of the

most important stronghold, next to Jerusalem, in Palestine.

"And who," he demanded, "is this extraordinary man who has obtained over the minds of so many kings an influence which they have so long refused to self-interest, or to the cause of their religion? Whose is the hand that has succeeded in breaking through the triple walls with which I had surrounded Ptolemaïs?"

Metchoub replied:

"As a word from our Prophet stilled the tempests in mid-air, so has the Archbishop of Tyre, by the sole power of his eloquence, hushed the suicidal quarrels which threatened annihilation to the Christians. As for this other marvel—the fall of Ptolemaïs; Richard and Philip Augustus took brave share in it, but never would they have accomplished their aim save for the indomitable sword of Montmorency."

"Unless I am under the influence of a dream," cried Saladin, "thou speakest falsely; for at this moment the Archbishop of Tyre and Josselyn of Montmorency are prisoners at Damietta . . ."

"So they were undoubtedly, great sultan," replied Metchoub; "but Malek Adhel gave them their liberty, and sent a numerous guard to escort them with all honor to the Crusaders' camp; reaching there on the 16th of the moon of Redgeb, the 17th witnessed the reconciliation of the Christians, and on the 18th they were masters of Ptolemaïs."

"Knowest thou what thou art doing with thy evil

words, vile slave?" cried the enraged sultan; "knowest thou that they arouse distrust of my brother?"

"Allah forbid that I should awaken in thy highness' mind the slightest doubt of the loyalty of the great Malek Adhel," Metchoub hastily answered: "thou hast no more faithful servant than thy brother; but my words will be confirmed, O illustrious sultan, by the brave soldiers who accompanied the prisoners from Damietta, and who, as a reward for their attentions, are the only Mussulmans at large in Ptolemaïs. Perhaps, but for the dread of thy just anger, and the listening ears that surround us, I might tell thee more."

"Come then; speak with me alone and freely, and as thou valuest thy head, take heed what thou sayest; for I know not how I could find pardon for the sacrilegious tongue that would dare to brand as a traitor the brother of my soul."

So saying, Saladin ordered his tent to be pitched and retired with Metchoub to its privacy. There, prostrating himself at his master's feet, the chief gave the explanation demanded of him.

"No, great prince," he said, "thy brother is no traitor; but he has been subjugated by a passion too extraordinary not to be the work of magic; a Christian maiden, whose marvellous beauty would deceive one into believing her an houri escaped from Paradise, has dazzled his eyes, and bewitched his soul. Since he has beheld her the illustrious Malek Adhel is no longer himself; he neglects the affairs of state which you have

entrusted to him and forgets alike the interests of his country and the commands of his master."

"And what name does this dangerous beauty bear?" asked Saladin; "what woman has possessed the power to thus emasculate the great soul of Malek Adhel?"

"The Princess Matilda of England, the sister of King Richard, a girl of sixteen, holds enchained at her feet, like the veriest slave, the mighty Seif Eddin * —it was for her sake he renounced his seraglio and dispersed his women; it was at her command he released from captivity the Archbishop of Tyre and the dauntless Montmorency; if she had so bidden him, he would have escorted her also to the Crusaders' camp, for he has sworn to obey every command of the Princess Matilda."

"This, at least, is a signal falsehood," retorted Saladin. "Malek Adhel has made no such vow, or she would have commanded him to betray into the hands of the Christians all the posts entrusted to him:—she would have induced him to become himself a Christian and to desert to the enemy. Answer me, Metchoub, has he done all this?"

"In sooth, no;" replied the chief, "not yet; but consider, oh, sultan, that this haughty princess has so far disdained to tamper with the loyalty he owes to his religion and country. It is said that to this day, inflexible and cold, she holds herself resolutely aloof—that his worship, his prayers, his submission, have not obtained from her a kinder look, a more encouraging word; they

* Sword of Religion; the soubriquet of which the brave prince was most proud.—*Michaud.*

say, in short, that he does not fulfil her will for the sole reason that she disdains to express it. But if passion should suddenly warm her frigid soul and she, casting aside her haughty reserve, should demand as the price of her love the sacrifice of his religion, of his country...."

"He would not hesitate an instant between his love and his duty!" interrupted Saladin angrily: "Malek Adhel is as incapable of betraying me as I am of doubting his honor. He may be in love — nay, he must be, for I am told that the women of Europe possess, to an eminent degrée, the powers of fascination; but, proud and beautiful though you represent this Princess of England, and though she may yield to the influence of love, she may obtain of Malek Adhel the sacrifice of his life, but never that of his honor. Listen, presumptuous slave; if thou hadst not shed thy blood for me upon many a hard fought field, thou should'st repay me with thy life for the foul suspicion thou hast dared to cast upon my brother's august name; but fear not, I shall refer to the clemency of him thou accusest authority to pronounce sentence upon thee. Depart immediately to Damietta, present thyself before Malek Adhel, confess thy crime, implore his forgiveness, remit to him the orders with which I shall charge thee, and witness for thyself his fidelity in executing them."

Obeying the sultan's signal of dismissal, Metchoub retired. Towards evening Saladin sent for him once more.

"These," he said to him, placing in his hand letters, sealed with the royal seals, "these will inform Malek Adhel of my wishes; they will be fulfilled, thou shalt

see, to the letter. First, he will send the Queen of England to Cairo and there retain her in rigid captivity, that Richard, moved by the sufferings of a wife to whom he is much attached, will accept the price I shall place upon her liberty — an immense price, I acknowledge; for I shall exact nothing less than the surrender of Ptolemaïs. Doubtless the other sovereigns who, sharing with him the conquest of that town, possess equal voice in the matter and less interest in relinquishing their claims, will oppose my demand; their refusal will excite fresh disputes among them — disputes so bitter that even the eloquence of the Archbishop of Tyre will not avail to suppress them, and thus he will afford me an opportunity to effectually crush my haughty foes.

"In the meantime Malek Adhel will assemble his troops from various posts, and uniting those stationed at Damietta and Cairo, he will join me with them at Mount Khouroutba, where I shall await him. Before his departure, however, he will send the Princess of England to her brother; a vessel will be prepared for her at Damietta and, if Malek Adhel grants thy pardon, thou, Metchoub, wilt escort her to the camp of the Crusaders at Ptolemaïs. I shall forewarn Richard of the arrival of the vessel, and in return for the great favor shown him in the restoration of his sister, will obtain for thee safe-conduct through his lines. Now hie thee hence, and see whether Malek Adhel will hesitate between a woman and his brother."

Saladin then gave orders that two of his best camels, an equal number of Arabian barbs, whose flying

feet scarce tracked the sand, and several trusty slaves, should be held in readiness for the departure of Metchoub.

Scarcely had night descended upon the earth when the sultan's messenger, already beyond Sefour, perceived the small fortress of Rama at the entrance of the desert.

While this bearer of evil tidings rapidly pursues his way we will anticipate his arrival and return to Damietta.

After the archbishop's departure Matilda, faithful to her promise, religiously secluded herself within her apartments, resisting with equal firmness the queen's arguments and the scarce-defined promptings of her own heart; the absence of William afforded her no excuse for a relaxation of her reserve; on the contrary, lacking the support of his superior judgment she lost self-confidence, and sought safety in utter seclusion.

At length the gentle queen, weary of her vain entreaties, dreading the effects of her sister's obstinacy upon the enamored prince, grieved at her prolonged captivity and consequent separation from her idolized husband, could no longer resist the accumulation of so many ills; her health failed her, and soon fears were entertained for her life.

When the news of Berengaria's alarming state was brought to the princess, Matilda, forgetting her own cares, flew to the queen's assistance, and remained with her by day and night. Malek Adhel also lavished upon his royal prisoner the most constant and delicate attentions. He sent to Alexandria for an Arabian physician,

renowned throughout the East, but all his cares seemed futile.

Berengaria daily lost strength, her eyes became dim, her spirits depressed, and Matilda, ever watchful and devoted, began to entertain a dread which filled her with sorrow and alarm.

One night, as she kept her usual vigils by the bedside of the unhappy queen, Berengaria expressed to her in those feeble tones so piteous to hear, her deep sense of obligation for the untiring care and devoted affection her sister had lavished upon her.

"And yet," she added after a moment's hesitation, "this affection which might have restored me to life and love, allows me to die!"

Amazed, the princess pressed Berengaria's thin, white hand.

"Speak," she exclaimed, "only tell me how I may save this precious life!"

"All I require," replied the queen, with more animation than she had shown for several days, "all I implore of you is that you receive — only once — Malek Adhel. Speak to him of me, obtain from him — it is possible for you alone — my restoration to Richard, whatever adverse commands he may receive from Saladin. Give me the hope of rejoining my husband, and you will see me gain each day in health and strength. My life — that of my unborn babe, depend upon your answer; ah, my sister, would that be sin which would effect so much good?"

"The sin would lie in a refusal, rather," replied

the princess; "rest in peace, Berengaria, your request shall be granted at the earliest opportunity. I will see the prince, I will kneel before him, I will implore his pity..."

"Give him your own also, Matilda; feel at least for the suffering you have inflicted upon him," interrupted the queen. "Though you do not respond to his love, look upon him without scorn; make your request with kindness, and he will thank you for having deigned to ask a favor."

The effect of Matilda's concession seemed the work of magic; with renewed hope the queen's unstrung nerves seemed to regain their natural elasticity; a peaceful repose supplanted the ceaseless unrest which had racked her brain, and with her pale hand still clasped in Matilda's, she fell into a sweet, untroubled sleep. Then the young girl, silently leaving her patient, repaired to the oratory, where she returned thanks to the Author of life.

Towards noon the next day the queen, feeling greatly benefited by her renewed hopes and long rest, left her bed and was carried to a divan placed near the window; there she breathed the pure, fresh air, and gazed with gladdened eyes upon the flowery plains of the Delta. The princess was kneeling beside her chanting in her low, sweet voice the canticles of the church, when a slave entered to announce that the prince was in the palace, awaiting tidings of the invalid.

Berengaria's beseeching eyes spoke more eloquently than words. Matilda silently pressed her hand in response, and left her to fulfil her promise.

In the jasper saloon she found Malek Adhel. Beholding before him, of her own free will, her whose presence he had so often and so vainly requested, the prince's surprise and delight knew no bounds. Standing as though rooted to the spot, spellbound, he seemed like one who, in a half-sleeping, half-conscious state, sees some beautiful vision, yet fears to move lest the day-dawn of reason dispel the delusive image of the night.

The young girl stopped short at the entrance of the saloon and bending her head with modest dignity, said:

"I have come, my lord, in the name of an unhappy queen to implore your mercy . . ."

"No more," cried the young Saracen eagerly; "words of pleading become not that charming mouth, 'tis yours to command! Behold at your feet, oh! sovereign lady, your devoted slave; speak, and you shall be obeyed."

"It is my will then, Prince," said the young girl with calm dignity, "that you do not humble yourself thus before me."

"Submission to your slightest wish, charming Princess, is my pride, not my humiliation!" replied Malek Adhel.

"Prince," she interrupted, "the queen is still very ill, I dare not absent myself long from her side; deign to hear the motive which has brought me here. Grief and anxiety have caused my sister's illness; their removal alone can save her precious life. You only can effect what else would seem a miracle; your promise to

restore her to her husband would recall her from the very gates of death, and if I have hoped that the magnanimity of Malek Adhel would grant me this inestimable favor, I relied less upon the power of my prayers, than upon the influence of his own generous impulses."

"Never," cried the enamored Saracen, "have I experienced such spells of enchantment; never have I heard such exquisite music as that which falls from those lovely lips; never has such perfect beauty ravished my senses; it is no longer the same air I breathe; all surroundings are changed for me — is this Heaven? Oh, Matilda, are you then . . . ?"

"My lord," she once more interrupted, a faint flush suffusing the whiteness of her brow, "my lord, only a step hence a queen mourns even unto death; her life is in your hands, she awaits her sentence."

"I know not what consequences may follow the act," replied Malek Adhel, "but your will is my law. You desire the queen's liberty? She is free. You wish her to be restored to her husband? It shall be done. What more do you require of me? Shall I bring kingdoms to lay at your feet? Do you wish the sacrifice of a life I have long since devoted to your service? Speak, beautiful Princess, I hear but to obey!"

"Ah, magnanimous Prince," exclaimed Matilda, much moved, "you have earned my eternal gratitude. My family will yet know happiness, and I shall owe it to you!"

"Oh, thou Heaven who hearest her," exclaimed the impassioned prince, "thou Heaven who didst create

and didst marvel then at the perfection of thy work — listen — Matilda thanks and praises me!"

The ecstatic tone and mien of the young Saracen, the uncontrolled passion of his gaze, disturbed the pure heart of the maiden, and she felt it was time to depart.

"Permit me to retire, Prince," she said. "While the queen still remains unconscious of your noble action, I can but partially enjoy the anticipation of the happiness we shâll owe to you."

"Aye, Princess, you must indeed be impatient to restore tranquillity to your sister's heart, and I do not seek to detain you; but believe me, neither the joy you will convey to her, nor your own as bearer of the glad tidings, will equal that which thrills my being at this moment. Matilda, 'tis *I* who am your eternal debtor!"

The young girl did not linger to analyse or even to respond to his words; bending her head to him, she dropped the curtain-draperies she had just parted from before the entrance, and disappeared from his sight.

With a joy to which her agitation at first denied utterance, Matilda flew to the queen.

"Give thanks to a merciful God, sweet sister," she cried at last; "your liberty is assured, and the day of your restoration to health will be that of your departure!"

"Oh, my husband and my king!" exclaimed Berengaria, half rising from her couch and lifting her clasped hands heavenward, "I shall then see you again! Already a new life courses through my throbbing veins — already my weak body seems infused with returning health and strength. I shall soon be ready

to depart.—And Thou, Oh Heavenly Father, forgive that a wife's first thought was not of Thee! Matilda, my sister, my saviour, how can I thank you? Ah, only in that Heaven where your pure thoughts tend already, will you receive a recompense worthy of your generous deed. And Malek Adhel, noble and magnanimous prince, when shall I see him? When shall I offer him the sacrifice of my heartfelt gratitude!"

Her agitation overcame her strength, pale and exhausted the queen fell back upon her pillows. Matilda, alarmed, implored her to be calm. "God does not look with favor upon excesses—even those of joy," she reasoned.

"Ah, sister," interrupted the loving wife, "I cannot submit myself to the will of God where my husband is concerned. Richard is dearer than He in my heart!"

"So I have long since perceived," responded the princess with a tender, half-reproving smile, "but without this fault you would possess none, and no creature upon earth is perfect."

Then, as night was near at hand, she begged of Berengaria a truce to all exciting thoughts.

The queen's tirewomen were summoned, and she was carried to her couch, where sleep soon came with refreshing touch to hasten the consummation of the happy dreams which brooded over her unconscious thoughts.

Matilda, less tranquil-hearted, wooed sleep in vain. The day had been intensely warm, the night was scarcely less oppressive; unable to rest, scarcely to

breathe for the extreme heat, she passed into a small cabinet adjoining the queen's chamber, whose windows overlooked the palace gardens. Tempted by the balmy breeze and peaceful calm without, she would fain have gone down for a solitary stroll, but the gloomy vastness of the grounds deterred her, and seating herself beside the open window, she opened her book of devotions and endeavored to read. But irrelevant thoughts came to distract her attention; unconsciously her eyes would close, her pretty head droop upon her hand, and while the zephyrs of the night played irreverent hide-and-seek among the leaves of the holy book, her girlish thoughts lived over every minutia of her interview with Malek Adhel. If a falling twig without, the twittering of a birdling displaced in its nest aroused her from her revery, she would start up like one caught in some guilty act and, with a modest blush which only God and the angels saw, would endeavor to recall her thoughts from their unbidden channel and resume the serious reading which, for the first time, alas, seemed to her so uninteresting. Then again fugitive thoughts she vainly strove to repulse would come flitting through her mind; if for a moment she succeeded in exorcising them, they but returned with accession of strength and numbers; her eyes yet continued to peruse the pages before her, her lips murmured the words of wisdom and religion, but her thoughts, for once refusing control, no longer followed them, but rested like an aureole above the head of the infidel prince.

So between alternations of short readings and pro-

longed reveries passed the night. At last, towards the dawn, wearied and dispirited by mental conflicts which had not crowned duty victor, the princess threw herself upon her bed, but she had scarcely slept a few hours when one of her women came to announce that the queen was awake and desired to speak to her.

Matilda hastened to answer the summons. She found Berengaria in the oratory, seated in an easy-chair before her *prie-dieu;* a priest stood beside her. A delicate color crept into the pale cheek of the invalid at her sister's entrance; she held out her hand which the princess clasped, inquiring what improvement rest and a relieved mind had wrought in her health.

Berengaria's brightening eyes and deepening color gave a reassuring answer.

"I wish to inaugurate this day of renewed life and hope, my sister," she said, "by celebrating that august ceremony through which the prayer and praise o humanity best ascend to [illegible]rone of Divine Grace Come, sweet sister," sh[illegible], "in your presence Heaven seems very near."

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When th[illegible]ervice of ma[illegible]cluded, two princ[illegible]ere once [illegible]e, s engaria su[illegible] Matilda

to occupy a low stool at the foot of the bed, the young girl's face in the soft glow of the light, intently. Several times she stopped to wipe her always heated as if [illegible] finally the [illegible] to [illegible] expectant girl.

"When you [illegible] yesterday, [illegible] you [illegible]"

"My son!" [illegible] "[illegible] necessary? [illegible]"

"Then it is [illegible]" [illegible] "the greatest [illegible]"

Marie grew white with terror.

"Would the prince be guilty of seeking to detain me here?" she asked anxiously.

"Pure and innocent heart," cried the queen, "in your judgment of others, as in your own actions, you [illegible] only justice and [illegible] do not dream of love, nevertheless it surrou[illegible] it touches, it encircles you under its various [illegible] passion of Agnes, in [illegible] ration of Malek Adhel, [illegible] affection for Richard; [illegible] see or to understand, [illegible] ever to know love for [illegible] could you have me se[illegible] y eye of taking?" [illegible] [illegible] upon the young novice [illegible]

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"I wish to inaugurate this day of renewed life and hope, my sister," she said, "by celebrating that august ceremony through which the prayer and praise of humanity best ascend to the throne of Divine Grace. Come, sweet sister," she added, "in your presence, Heaven seems very near."

The princess was too much dissatisfied with the vigils of the night not to blush guiltily at praises she felt were so unmerited, but thanking the queen for her thoughtfulness in summoning her, she endeavored in the observance of her religious duties to regain that peace she had so vainly sought.

When the service of mass was concluded, and the two princesses were once more alone together, Berengaria summoned Matilda to her side, signing her

to occupy a low cushion at her feet; then taking the young girl's hands in her own she gazed at her intently. Several times she essayed to speak; but always hesitated, as if between anxiety and doubt; finally the feeble voice found strength to question the expectant girl.

"When you petitioned the prince for my liberty, yesterday, Matilda, did you ask your own also?"

"My own!" exclaimed the astonished girl; "was it necessary? Could he dream of parting us?"

"Then it is as I feared," said the queen sadly; "our greatest obstacle still exists, how shall we overcome it?"

Matilda grew white with terror.

"Would the prince be guilty of seeking to detain me here?" she asked anxiously.

"Pure and innocent heart," cried the queen, "in your judgment of others, as in your own actions, you consider only justice and virtue. You do not dream of love, nevertheless it surrounds you; it touches, it encircles you! Vainly it shows itself to you under its various forms; in the violent and criminal passion of Agnes, in the impassioned but respectful devotion of Malek Adhel, in my own tender and legitimate affection for Richard; your chaste regard, unwilling to see or to understand, turns alike from all!"

"And have I not promised never to know love for man?" replied the princess; "would you have me renounce the vows I am on the very eve of taking?"

The queen smiled tenderly upon the young novice. After a moment's thought she said:

"You are right, Matilda; your high destiny as the bride of Christ must forever close your heart to human love; but I, sister, to whom such love is at once a duty and a glory, I cannot ignore the effect of that passion upon Malek Adhel; he will never consent to your departure."

"What do I hear!" cried the unhappy girl; "what wretched fate awaits me — what fearful plans does he harbor against me!"

"I attribute to him none which should at present alarm you," said the queen reassuringly, "for if the prince loves you much, he respects you even more. But consent to a separation from you! I do not believe that a heart subject to Love's tender rule possesses sufficient strength for so great a sacrifice as you require of him."

"Then," said the princess sadly, "I shall have to see the prince once more to make a second request."

But Berengaria, more worldly wise, rejected this proposal, aware that the more the arbiter of their fate was encouraged the less they had to expect from his self-denial; the more charmingly Matilda pleaded, the less could love have power to forego.

"I will speak to the prince myself," said the queen; "perhaps I may be able to convince him that the barrier which separates you is insuperable; that he will never find happiness in your disgrace: and if my prayers are fruitless, if he refuses my petition, the liberty he has bestowed upon me will have been but a profitless gift — I must die here."

"And why should it be so, Berengaria?" cried the young princess. "Why should you remain to languish here? Because God ordains suffering as my portion, must you, too, become a victim?"

The queen feebly replied that duty would not permit her to leave her alone in Damietta.

"Your duty," firmly responded the princess, "commands you to return to your husband the moment the means are at your disposal; and mine," she added, full of faith, "mine forbids me to share with another the ills with which Heaven sees fit to burthen me. God will be my strength and my support — and He will not fail me. Go then, sister, go without fear, for in leaving me alone you do not leave me desolate."

As she spoke such holy faith beamed in her uplifted eyes, such plenitude of religious enthusiasm irradiated her countenance, that it seemed as though the Divine Presence encircled and sustained her beyond the reach of a profaning thought or touch. The pious queen looked upon this transfiguration and marvelled; then she bowed her head before her, as though some saint or angel had come to her unawares.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE same day Malek Adhel's arrival was announced to the queen. She received him in her room, with her sister as usual at her side. Berengaria was

deeply moved at his expressions of lively joy for her recovery.

"It is you, generous prince, to whom I owe this renewed gift of life," she said gratefully. "I shall soon tell Richard, I shall announce it to the world, I shall some day tell it to my son, and the name of Malek Adhel shall be the first his infant tongue shall learn to lisp. Oh, great prince, may their united benisons be your reward — this world affords none greater than such offerings from grateful hearts."

"But Heaven hath richer gifts to bestow," said the princess, blushing at her temerity, "and Malek Adhel might possess them if he would."

The young Saracen gazed at her intently but in silence; the emotions wrestling within him were so conflicting that he feared to speak, lest losing control of his hitherto untrammelled thoughts they should burst from his lips in words of fiery, uncontrollable passion. He had observed that the unreserved betrayal of his feelings seemed to alarm the young girl, and suspected this to be the cause of her rigid seclusion. Love turned a fresh page to his eager searching; to obtain her confidence he must offer her only delicate attentions, deference, respectful submission, studiously concealing his passion until such time as she, too, had learned a lesson of love.

Answering the queen at last, he assured her that he desired no greater reward than the gratification of having saved her; the happiness of having given pleasure to Matilda. Berengaria, perceiving her opportunity,

with faltering voice but courageous heart now broached the subject at this moment nearest to her thoughts:

"It is assuredly not to me alone you have granted the precious boon of freedom, my lord; my sister . . ."

"Your sister did not ask for herself," answered the prince vehemently.

"Could she consider it necessary so to do, my lord," interposed Berengaria, mustering fresh courage to the demand of the occasion; "did we not have your princely word that we should not be separated?"

"Is it your wish to go, madam?" asked Malek Adhel, turning to the princess and making a mighty effort to restrain the agitation which racked his soul. "Do you wish to leave Damietta?"

"Assuredly, Sire," replied the princess. "My eyes yearn to behold the land of my birth, my heart cries for its kindred, and will not be quieted in this home of the alien."

The prince changed color; he started as though a sharp pang had suddenly pierced him and walked rapidly away to the further end of the room. At an open window he paused, and resting his elbow on the marble sill, his head upon his open palm, he remained for some time absorbed in profound thought.

The queen and the princess watched him closely, vainly striving to divine whether the meditation they dared not disturb was auspicious or unfavorable to their hopes.

After awhile he returned, and with some constraint of manner informed the queen that when return-

ing strength permitted her to set the day for her departure, it would be time enough to decide upon that of the princess.

"And if in the meantime you will condescend sometimes to hear me," he added, addressing the young girl, "I will inform you of the reasons which influence me in deferring my decision until then. But if those reasons do not move you, if you persist in your resolve, knowing that you carry my life, my happiness with you, then, madam, I will resist no more; your simple request shall be the signal for your departure and for the sacrifice of my life."

Despite the courage which had sustained him on many a bloody battle-field, despite the pride which not the power of a world could move, some tears of pain and grief dimmed the eyes of the young warrior and fell upon his bronzed cheek. Ere he had brushed them furtively away Matilda had perceived them, and her own flowed unrestrained. His own agitation increasing at beholding hers, Malek Adhel felt that he could no longer contain the expression of a passion which, like an impetuous torrent, threatened to break through all self-imposed bounds; and without trusting himself to speak or even to look at her, the Saracen turned away and left the room.

"Do not despair," the queen said to Matilda when they were once more alone, "the obstacles to your departure will be less serious than I had imagined. I perceive that the tears and prayers of woman are all-powerful over the noble heart of Malek Adhel."

"But do you believe, Berengaria, that his death will be the result of my departure?" asked the princess anxiously.

"Should you continue to treat him with the same severity," answered Berengaria, "perhaps his despair might drive him to some desperate end; but if you will see him sometimes, if you will receive him with kindness and consideration, you may eventually succeed in inspiring him with such peace as reigns within your own soul. If you find it impossible to bring him to recognize the true God, you may at least teach him that a hero who fears not death should aspire to a courage still more exalted, and dare to brave with patience and fortitude the ills of life."

Admitting the justice of the queen's reasoning, Matilda promised to no longer evade the prince. In taking a resolution so opposed to the archbishop's counsels the young girl had no thought of disobeying him; circumstances having so changed, she believed her conduct should be regulated accordingly, and she did not perceive that in Berengaria's weak state, pity and sympathy were near akin, and the prince's unfortunate passion had won both from her.

But it frequently occurred, notwithstanding the young novice's reliance upon her sister's judgment, that her innocent prayers were troubled with importunate doubts concerning a course she had adopted so contrary to the advice of the archbishop, and these were invariably followed by idle reveries, in which pain was strangely mingled with a vague sense of happiness.

With a sudden recalling of her wandering thoughts, the young girl, conscience stricken, would strive by redoubled prayers and acts of the severest penance to repair her fault; and still, despite all her resolves, amid her devotions the image of Malek Adhel was ever before her, and would not be denied.

Berengaria ere long perceived the change which severe mental struggles, fasts, and vigils had wrought in the young girl; but the loving queen, who saw all things only through the medium of her affections, and who could conceive of no sorrow equal to that of being separated from Richard, attributed her sister's sadness to a dread of not being permitted to accompany her, and to weariness of the isolated life they led at Damietta.

Day by day the struggle between stern duty and nascent love divided the heart of the young princess; her strength began to wane, her cheek grew white and transparent; unfortunately, the delicate languor which now possessed her invested her beauty with a new charm, and Malek Adhel as he gazed upon her grew the more enamored. But he had at last learned love's lesson well, and he kept his own counsel. If a soft blush stained the whiteness of her cheek on his approach, he was content; expecting much, he feigned to have relinquished all hope.

His consideration rendered Matilda less uneasy, confidence in him began to spring up beneath the shade of his reserve. Sometimes she met his respectful glance and smiled upon him, or answered his remarks with kindly encouragement. He spoke no more of love, but

his eyes, his tone, his entire being revealed the one absorbing thought; like a consuming fire his passion surrounded, enveloped, absorbed its object; the more it was denied the vent of utterance, the more intense became its fervor, the more importunately it sought outlet in glance, and motion, and slightest *badinage*, and to these masked batteries — love's most efficient weapons, to which conscious virtue often succumbs — innocence was the sole opponent.

Several days had passed and Berengaria, finding her strength returning, prepared for her departure. It was now time to broach the subject to the prince, and to learn whether her sister would be permitted to accompany her. The subject was one she dreaded to renew, conscious of the pain it must inflict upon him to whom she was indebted for life and liberty; but having decided to depart even if unsuccessful, duty bade her at least make the effort to rescue her sister from the perils which beset her.

One evening the queen, accompanied by the princess, repaired to the jasper saloon. Seating themselves among the cushions near an open window, they gazed in silence upon the flowery groves of the Delta, and beyond in the distance upon the restless waves of the sea, gleaming like molten gold in the rays of the setting sun. The prince followed close upon the announcement of his presence. He came and seated himself at the princess' feet. Berengaria kept silence, seeking in her kindly heart for those magic words of comfort with which woman knows how to heal the wounds she must

inflict. But for once her ready wit deserted her, and she could find no expressions to convey to her benefactor a disappointment from which there was no appeal. While she thus reflected her silence had grown embarrassing; the timid girl, aware that upon her devolved for the moment the entertainment of their guest, found no words at her command; wherever her eyes might rove, she felt those of Malek Adhel burning into her very soul; if she turned away and suffered her gaze to wander to the landscape without, he would bend low and, deeming himself unobserved, press his lips to the hem of her dress; to permit the act by seeming to ignore it she knew was wrong, yet in repulsing him she must acknowledge her cognizance of it, and to this her maiden modesty refused consent.

At length Matilda could no longer endure the trying situation in which she was placed, and without farther hesitation, she arose to leave the room.

The movement aroused the queen from her abstraction. Detaining her sister by a sign, she turned hastily to the prince.

"My lord," she said, "the time has arrived when I may at length set the day for my departure. I shall die if I do not go — but I cannot go without Matilda."

Pained, half-frightened by the emotion depicted upon the countenance of the young Saracen, Berengaria could say no more.

But Malek Adhel replied with forced composure:

"If your sister exacts it, madam, after to-day she shall see me no more; but in return, I ask of her a

private interview. Afterwards, if she insists upon accompanying you, I shall not oppose her, and the day of departure will depend upon yourselves."

As though resigned to his fate the prince sighed deeply. Berengaria, touched with pity and surprise, looked kindly upon him, and turning to Matilda awaited her consent. But the young girl, with downcast eyes and crimson cheeks, remained silent.

Then the queen rose, and with a decision of tone which admitted no denial, she said:

"You have heard the prince, Matilda; your departure now depends upon yourself. I leave you with a kind and considerate friend; you cannot refuse to hear what he may have to say to you."

"Oh, may I not be spared this!" cried the princess, in tones of earnest entreaty.

"No," answered Malek Adhel, "not without a degree of cruelty foreign to a nature like yours; remember that my very life depends upon this sacrifice I ask of you — an interview of a few moments only."

The princess no longer refused; Berengaria left the room and Malek Adhel took the seat she had occupied.

There was a long silence between them, which the prince apparently lacked courage to break and Matilda dreaded that he should. But if he did not speak to her, his eyes devoured her beauty and would not be satiated. And now if he was still silent, it was no longer from the timidity of love, but because words were not capable of expressing the ecstasy which enthralled him. Gazing upon her with worshipping eyes, sighing with passion-

ate tenderness he drew nearer, he touched her; a burning blush mounted to the young girl's pure brow, she could not breathe; the kerchief upon her bosom rose and fell with the motion of her throbbing heart. Malek Adhel, whom nothing escaped, perceived it, and hope gained ground within him; with hope he lost all power of self-control, and dared to strain to his breast the virgin consecrated to the Lord.

Unhappy girl! the lightnings of heaven are less quick in consuming their prey than was this rapturous embrace in lighting the flame of love within her innocent heart. But modesty took alarm; religion shuddered; she indignantly repulsed the presumptuous Mussulman, and buried in both hands her blushes and her tears.

At the sight of her grief Malek Adhel knelt before her; he was in despair at having offended her; for even in those happy climes where knighthood honored woman, none had ever known a purer devotion than that which burned in the heart of this young Saracen. He vowed to show her henceforth an inviolable respect, and promised to no longer intrude upon her the expression of a passion which she disdained; he implored her to listen to him; but she refused, and with haughty dignity she withdrew. He no longer possessed courage to detain her, but still on bended knee he extended his arms towards her, imploring her to hear his words of penitence; he would not presume to approach nearer, he said, if she would but listen to him.

The princess at last turned to him and, looking at him with cold, stern eyes, answered:

"I will listen to but one word — the order for my departure."

"And is this the sole condition of my pardon?" asked the prince sorrowfully.

"If my liberty is restored to me," said the princess, "I promise to retain only the remembrance of your benefits, that of your insults I will put away forever."

Rash girl, she had promised what she would never be able to fulfil, for the memories of this hour must ever remain with her, sharing the precious moments of her religious devotions, brooding over her innocent dreams, absorbing her maiden reveries, thrilling her very being with a strange, new sense of delight.

A prey to the fierce warring of love and self-sacrifice within him, Malek Adhel hesitated; he had not the courage to sign his own death-warrant, but the princess would wait no longer, she turned to leave him and — the future was nothing to him, the present all — to purchase a few moments more of her presence he resolved to condemn himself to an eternal bereavement.

"Stay," he implored, "it shall be as you will!"

The princess paused once more, her countenance radiant, her eyes full of joy.

"Oh, my peaceful cloister!" she cried, forgetting in her delight the pain it had cost a heart which loved her. "O land of my birth! O companions of my childhood, shall I then behold you again!"

"Ungrateful, heartless girl!" exclaimed the prince rushing towards her and despite her resistance seizing her hand, "you bless the hour which blasts my life—

your eyes beam with joy in pronouncing my death-warrant! Not a regret for my fate — not a tear for my pain! And yet, treated with such cruelty, I must not presume to risk offending one who wounds me unto death without vouchsafing even her pity! No, you *shall* not go! You *shall* hear me!"

Compelling the princess to be seated, he bent the knee once more before her, clasped both of her hands in one of his, and resting the other upon the back of her chair gazed at her with resolute, loving eyes. "Yes," he cried, "you shall hear me, you shall know the passion which consumes me, the transports I have enchained, the torments which are at once my heaven and my hell; since neither my silence nor my deference have been able to soften you, you shall behold my love, hearken to its voice, whether you will or no, listen to its cries of infinite pain — perhaps they may reach your heart at last!"

The princess, terrified by such an excess of passion, averted her face.

"Oh, look upon me once more," he pleaded, "in pity look upon me; earth has no greater joy to bestow than that which thrills my whole being from the heaven of your eyes. — No, I promise in vain; I cannot be parted from you; I cannot send you from my sight; in this only will I refuse obedience; in all else command me. Do you wish to return to Europe? I am ready to accompany you thither. Would you rule here, a queen? I will conquer you a crown. Oh, supreme mistress of my destiny, listen to my pleading,

and answer me from the promptings of a yielding heart!"

Overcome by his emotions he ceased speaking, he trembled like a noble ship caught in the whirl of the tempest; passionate tears unchecked welled up into his burning eyes and dropped upon the clasped hands of the young girl. He no longer sought to restrain her; his strength of will was gone; utter hopelessness had usurped the place of all his former dreams of happiness.

Free from restraint she still remained impassive; withheld, not by her lover's hand but by her own weakness. Once more hope revived in Malek Adhel's heart; for one moment he was supremely happy, but his ephemeral joy vanished with the irresolution which had given it birth. The princess could no longer ignore that only her lover's eyes enchained her beside him, and she blushed to find herself still there. Duty commanded her to depart, and she obeyed. Malek Adhel at last perceived that purity and religion had raised an inviolable rampart around her, and he bowed before a power he could not overcome.

"Go then," he said, a certain majesty of mien ennobling, as it were, the suffering which paled his cheek and dimmed his eyes, "go, you are free!"

Her heart was moved with infinite pity for a sorrow she could but must not relieve. "Oh, magnanimous prince," she said, "why do you yield to such violent grief, such useless affection! What have you to hope? Can there be a possible bond between Richard and the

brother of Saladin? Can there be union between a Christian maiden and a Mussulman prince? Have you not courage to face like a brave man the decrees of fate?"

Her calm reasoning, her unassuming dignity unconsciously wrought a soothing influence upon him; perceiving her success, she now gave willing voice to words of comfort.

"And if," she continued, "exalted above a weakness which so sorely tempts your nobler nature, you permit me to return to the life to which God has ordained me, never shall man claim from me the gratitude, the esteem, which you will have earned at so great a sacrifice . . . ."

"And your love, Matilda," interrupted the prince, "that will be bestowed upon another!"

"Never, my love — my vows are God's alone! Oh, Malek Adhel, let me return to the altars of that God to whom I am consecrated — that God to whom, alas, I might have preferred you, had He made you a Christian!"

She stopped suddenly, alarmed by her rash avowal, but Malek Adhel only said:

"Whatever be your wish, Princess, I submit. Order, select your route, your cortége, your servants — dispose of me, and all this palace contains, as you may see proper."

Fearing his weakness might once more gain the ascendency the princess hastened to withdraw. At the threshold she turned her face towards him once more,

smiled upon him a tender, longing smile — such a smile as wafts to Heaven the departing spirit, and waving her hand in mute farewell she passed from his sight.

Then, the restraining influence of her presence denied him, the Saracen once more became a prey to his bitter disappointment, his fierce passions. He walked the floor with rapid strides, blinded as one who has long gazed upon the sun to all save the one image that had just departed out of his sight, deaf to all save the music of her voice which seemed still to thrill the pulsing air around him.

A slave approached, and after vainly awaiting permission, spoke to him. Malek Adhel gazed vacantly at him without replying, turned on his heel and retired to his own apartments.

The slave had come to announce the arrival of Metchoub, and already tidings of the fall of Ptolemaïs had spread like wildfire throughout Damietta. The populace alarmed for the fate of Jerusalem rushed *en masse* to the mosques, the soldiers assembled about the palace, the emirs called for Malek Adhel, but he had secluded himself from sight and none dared approach him unsummoned. While all around him wild rumors were afloat, gaining force as they sped, Malek Adhel, wrapped in meditation, was the only being in the city ignorant of the fall of Ptolemaïs.

But Metchoub, after vainly waiting to be summoned before the prince, insisted upon going to him at once, and would not be denied. He displayed the orders of the sultan, sealed with the royal seal, and

before that token of supreme authority doors flew open before him and the very guards of Malek Adhel's household dared not refuse him admittance. Metchoub entering the palace, presented himself before the astonished prince, and tendered him in silence Saladin's letter. Receiving with respect and pleasure this token from a brother so dear to him, Malek Adhel inquired at what point Metchoub had left the sultan.

"On Mount Kouroutba," the envoy replied, "where he impatiently awaits your coming, relying upon you to regain Ptolemais which the Christians have taken from us."

"The Christians masters of Ptolemais!" cried Malek Adhel astonished.

"I marvel that you should be surprised since 'tis you, Prince, to whom we owe its loss."

"What is this you dare to insinuate, insolent slave!" exclaimed the indignant prince.

"I assert that 'tis the eloquence of the Archbishop of Tyre, and the valor of Montmorency which have gained Ptolemais to the Christians; to you they owed their liberty, 'tis to you, then, I attribute our misfortune. I have accused you before your brother, I will not take back my words before you; if you judge them false and undeserved, punish me, my life is in your hands, so Saladin bids me say to you."

Conscious of the justice of these reproaches, and too brave and true to blush at acknowledging his error, Malek Adhel answered:

"You accuse me, Metchoub, well, I accuse myself;

your candor and your fidelity should be rewarded, rather than punished. I have committed a grave error, but I will redeem it with the restoration of Ptolemaïs."

"Without doubt — none question the might and courage which have never yet known defeat; but how will you restore the lives of the faithful Mussulmans, Prince, who have fallen in its defence?"

"Enough, Metchoub," said the prince gloomily, "my heart is sorely troubled. I well know that the phantoms of those whose blood I have caused to flow will not be laid unavenged. Leave me now, I would take counsel with my brother, and discover in these missives you have brought me what expiation he demands for an act whose consequences have been so disastrous, though the impulses which actuated me were too sacred to be disregarded."

"What say you, illustrious Prince!" retorted Metchoub disdainfully, "a warrior of your renown allowing his laurels to be tarnished by an insensate passion, preferring to his stricken country a Christian vagabond!"

"Not another word, slave," shouted the enraged prince; "as you value your head, silence your audacious tongue. Beware how, with another word, you insult the Princess of England! Begone from my sight!"

Metchoub obeyed the last, but not the first command of the angry prince. The shame of defeat, the mortification of having been compelled to deliver to the Christians with his own hands the keys of Ptolemaïs; the remembrance of his brave men mowed down in legions around him, of his captive family, his murdered

sons, rankled in his soul and gave birth to a bitter hatred towards the author of so many misfortunes. Unable to restrain the rancor seething within him, he went forth before the people, thence to the troops, the emirs, the nobles, and openly reproached the weakness of their prince and the Christian woman whose spells had enthralled him, for the disasters which now filled them with so much sorrow and alarm.

The emirs and the nobles were too sincerely attached to Malek Adhel to permit his motives to be questioned or his honor impugned; but they readily united with Metchoub in ascribing to the Princess of England the misfortunes they bewailed and received with acclamations of joy the news that Saladin had charged Metchoub himself with orders to convey her back immediately to the Crusaders' camp.

While the designing emissary of Saladin busied himself in spreading these tidings and complaints throughout the city, Malek Adhel in his private cabinet was perusing his brother's letter. He found therein a confirmation of Metchoub's intimation, that to the return of the archbishop and Montmorency was due the fall of Ptolemaïs. He perceived, too, that some enemy of his own people had sought to awaken suspicions of his loyalty in the mind of the sultan, and that Saladin had repulsed them on the spot. Instead of the reproaches he so well deserved, his brother but asked his aid—asked where he might command. Should he respond to such a token of faith in him by fresh wrongs?

The sacrifice required of him would demand all the

resolution and fortitude he could summon; but had he not already, yielding to the princess' own prayers, promised her release?

And now the commands of his sovereign, the interests of his country, had placed their inviolable signet upon the promise the princess' tears had wrung from him. Yet love was strong in his great, brave heart,—the stronger in a nature such as his for the obstacles which had tried it — for the one last supreme struggle, which was even now going on within him, between that love and honor.

Love must yield to honor, but should loyalty to his brother compel him to break his plighted word to the Queen of England? He had promised to restore her to her husband, yet Saladin's orders on this point were peremptory. Metchoub was fully acquainted with them and had doubtless spread them abroad, so he had no resource left except to invoke the aid of his army against the will of the sultan; he knew that he possessed the influence to do it, but had he the right? Could he avail himself of the authority with which his brother had invested him in Egypt, to betray him? It was now no longer between weakness and duty that he hesitated, but between two obligations equally imperative. Finally his decision was taken. On the morrow he would give orders that a vessel should be prepared to convey Matilda to Ptolemaïs, the dawn of the day following should find her on her way. He himself would conduct the queen to Cairo, and leaving her there at liberty and mistress in the palace of the caliphs, would hasten to

Saladin and require of him the ratification of the promise he had given, and an order for the queen's release.

And so the night was spent in mortal wrestlings and heroic resolves; yet when the morning came, and the sun arose as if from the bosom of the sea and shed his beams of light over the universe, the young Saracen shuddered when he thought of the sacrifice this day must inaugurate — of the passionate love which honor had conquered yet not subdued.

But the battle was won; and Malek Adhel, leaving the palace, repaired to the harbor to himself select the vessel which should bear so precious a burthen; he issued the most minute orders concerning the comfort and welfare of the princess; then, mistrusting a weakness of which he was conscious and ashamed, he resolved to leave Damietta without seeing Matilda, and to return only after her departure. On his way he met Metchoub.

"Slave," he said haughtily, "to-morrow the princess accompanies you. Watch over her with unceasing care, as you value your worthless life!"

The prince then entrusted to him a letter for the queen, in which he stated that owing to the sultan's orders which he could not disregard without causing a revolt in Damietta, he had decided to defer the fulfilment of his promise. In a couple of days he would accompany her to Cairo, and he promised that shortly after he would send her an escort to conduct her to the camp of the Crusaders.

Then without venturing to return to the palace, or

even to allow his thoughts to revert to the princess, Malek Adhel quitted Damietta and repaired to Peluse and Pharamia; thence he passed into the various towns bordering the sea and rising along the mouth of the Nile, collecting troops, and mustering and drilling them preparatory to marching to the mountains of Kouroutba in accordance with the sultan's orders.

CHAPTER XIV.

HAVING learned from her sister, immediately after her interview with the prince, of the success which had crowned their hopes, Berengaria counted as wasted from her life every day which separated her from Richard. She had already planned the very hour of their leaving Damietta — the moment she might hope to be clasped in her husband's loving arms. All that night, while so cruel a disappointment was busily wrecking the blissful anticipations of the queen, happy dreams kept vigils over her sleep, and were not dispelled on her awaking, but rather seemed merged into a brighter reality.

In the midst of her happiness she remembered the Princess of Jerusalem and, ever thoughtful of others in her joy as in her sorrow, she hastened to apprise the wretched woman that she would now be enabled to fulfil her promise and restore her to her people.

For some time past Agnes had refused to receive the queen on the plea that she must remain in utter solitude in order to overcome her evil impulses, and acquire

a frame of mind suitable for the reception of religious teachings. In reality, she only desired to avoid seeing those whom she hated with a bitter, jealous hatred, in return for the benefits she had received at their hands.

Resolved not to be altogether parted from the object of her guilty love, Agnes had employed spies who informed her of every movement of the prince, and of the progress of his wooing of the beautiful Princess of England. Their reports filled the wretched woman with rage and desire to revenge her fancied wrongs. She only waited to discover whether Malek Adhel in releasing the queen, would dare to retain her sister. By this token she would prove him: once satisfied of the extent of the prince's love for her rival, her dagger would know how to avenge her wrongs and reach his heart through that of the woman for whom she had been deserted.

Agnes was one of the first to learn of the arrival of Metchoub and desired to see him. The guard, bribed with lavish hand, introduced him secretly to her apartments. From him she learned the orders with which he had been charged by Saladin; and by portraying to him the prince's infatuation as capable of leading to the commission of great crimes, and assuring him of the unworthiness of the object of that passion, she succeeded in confirming the unfavorable impressions he already entertained towards the sultan's brother, and inspired him with additional zeal in hastening the departure of the princess.

In the midst of her plans Agnes was surprised by a visit from the queen.

"I have come to redeem my promise, Agnes," she said with her kindly smile, "I have come to bid you depart with us from these scenes of your shame, that among your own people you may shed tears of repentance for your errors."

"What!" exclaimed Agnes, "has not your majesty yet been informed that the order for your departure has been revoked?"

"What are you saying?" asked the queen with a vague sense of anxiety, "only yester-evening Malek Adhel promised my sister that we should depart."

"And but a few hours after that promise was given, Metchoub arrived with despatches from the Sultan, and tidings of the fall of Ptolemaïs. Doubtless, madam, this great victory will so gladden your heart that you will forget the disappointments and sufferings which are in reserve for you . . ."

"Ptolemaïs is taken!" cried the queen, "and with this announcement you speak of misfortunes in store for me. Was this victory then dearly bought? Were many lives lost? Perhaps some mighty chief was laid low—Philip Augustus . . ." her pallid lips refused to frame the name that lay nearest her thoughts.

"It is said the siege was a scene of horrible carnage, and that the Christians paid dearly for their success. Metchoub was not acquainted with the names of the fallen, nor did he mention that of Philip Augustus. All I know from him is, that Saladin orders the Princess

Matilda to be sent back to the camp of the Crusaders, and your majesty to be retained at Cairo in close confinement until Richard consents to relinquish Ptolemaïs as the price of your liberty."

The wretched queen heard no more. In her weakened state this fresh trial was more than she could bear, and she fell fainting to the floor.

"Ah," cried the exultant Agnes, "some one else now requires aid and protection; I do not suffer alone!"

Then summoning the princess and her women, she remained a passive spectator of their anxiety and distress as they endeavored to recall the queen to consciousness.

Their efforts were at length successful. As Berengaria unclosed her heavy lids she perceived Matilda kneeling at her side; then she shuddered as she beheld the cruel countenance of Agnes, which so vividly recalled the blow she had received and the hand which had so heartlessly dealt it.

"Take me hence," cried the queen excitedly, "take me from the sight of that cruel woman who so rejoiced in the wounds she inflicted upon me!"

Matilda turned with surprise to Agnes, demanding an explanation of the strange scene.

"The unhappy are always unjust," Agnes answered coldly; "because I informed the queen that Saladin had condemned her to an eternal captivity, she accuses me as though it were I who had signed the warrant."

"An eternal captivity!" cried Matilda, endeavoring to reassure the queen, "do not believe it, Berengaria;

such barbarity is not possible even to an infidel. Rely upon the faith of Malek Adhel; he is too noble to violate his pledge."

"Your influence over him is well known," Agnes insolently retorted, "and no one could doubt the price you will offer him for the queen's liberty; but for once your power will fail before that of Saladin."

"I rely," said Matilda, without deigning to notice, and indeed scarcely comprehending Agnes' insulting insinuations, "I rely solely upon the inviolability of an oath, and the influence of honor even among unbelievers."

"Your own loyalty to these unbelievers will at least gain slight credence," rejoined Agnes with a bitter laugh. "Oh, fair novice, consecrated to the service of a jealous God, who shall doubt the artifices with which you have seduced the infidel Malek Adhel!"

But the taunt aimed at a conscience pure and serene, failed to wound.

"Wretched woman," she answered, full of pity and forgiveness, "have you then lost all recollection of the power of virtue and purity over the hearts of men? Will not repentance . . ."

"I repent only of having permitted you to enter here!" Agnes passionately interrupted.

"You shall not be further troubled with my presence," answered the Princess of England coldly; "the queen is now sufficiently restored to be carried to her own apartments."

With the assistance of the queen's women she raised

the prostrate form of Berengaria and, winding her strong young arms about her, assisted her from the room. At the threshold she turned once more to Agnes with a look in which pity had left no room for anger.

"Oh, Princess of Jerusalem," she said softly, "be true to your better nature; mourn for your past infatuation, resolve to live a holier life; come when you will, our arms will open to receive and shelter you."

But Agnes answered only with a smile of scorn and derision, and Matilda no longer delayed the queen's feeble steps.

On reaching her chamber Berengaria threw herself upon her couch, weeping violently and calling wildly for the prince. Matilda, alarmed by her sister's agitation, summoned the Duke of Lancaster, and on his arrival bade him go with all speed to Malek Adhel and ascertain the reliability of the information they had just received.

"It is already too late, madam," answered the duke: "on my way hither I learned that the prince was just leaving Damietta, and that he had charged Metchoub with the execution of Saladin's orders during his absence. To-morrow your highness embarks for Ptolemaïs."

"Oh, sister," cried the wretched queen, "if Malek Adhel leaves us, I am lost. Fly to him — implore his mercy; tell him that my life depends on my release!"

"Be calm, Berengaria, I beg of you. I go; I will kneel before him, I will not rise until I have obtained my request. Duke of Lancaster, conduct me to the prince's palace."

Hastily leaving the palace, the young girl entered a court-yard filled with soldiers; thinking only of her sister she forgot her natural timidity, and endeavored to penetrate to the apartments of the prince; the guards stopped her progress. She requested to see Malek Adhel, and was informed that he had just left Damietta.

This news seemed to the excited girl the death-knell of her sister. She trembled and turned pale. Just then Metchoub issued from the very palace whose doors had been closed against her. Without respect for her rank, without pity for her grief, he harshly informed her that she had nothing to hope from him; that on the morrow she would be on her way to rejoin her brother, while the queen, removed to Cairo, would be held in confinement until Ptolemaïs should be restored to the Mussulmans.

The princess was overwhelmed with grief, but she would leave no means untried; she humbled herself before the infidel chief, and on her knees implored mercy for a suffering woman, a captive queen.

Metchoub, surprised at her persistence, could not comprehend how any living creature should presume to oppose, even with prayers and tears, the sultan's will.

"Christian," he said roughly, "what do you ask of me? Do you not know that Saladin's commands are sacred to his subjects? If he had required your life of me, in an instant this poniard should drink your heart's blood; if he demanded my head, I would carry it to him myself. You see how useless are entreaties; retire to your apartments, and be prepared to accom-

pany me to-morrow at break of day. You will give to the wife of Richard these written instructions which Malek Adhel left for her."

He turned abruptly on his heel and left her without further speech. With the prince's letter in her hand Matilda felt a revival of hope; his generous heart must have prompted him to send some comfort to the unfortunate queen. She hastened to rejoin her.

"What tidings do you bring, sister!" cried Berengaria as the princess entered her chamber. In silence Matilda placed the paper in her hand.

"Is it the order for my departure?" cried the queen, as with trembling fingers she opened the letter.

She saw but the fatal blow to her hopes, she read no more — neither the expression of his regret, nor the promises he renewed; and her despair knew no bounds.

"And so Malek Adhel has left Damietta! You saw him not! You will not be here when he returns!" murmured the queen. "Our fate is in the hands of the brutal Metchoub.... You do not answer me," she added irritably, as the weeping girl silently embraced her. "I ask you whether sentence of death has been pronounced against me, and you are dumb."

She ceased speaking, and pressed her clasped hands tightly against her heart as though to still its tumultuous throbbing.

"Why do you weep, Matilda, you who will see Richard, you upon whose life that of no innocent babe depends! Oh, leave tears for the suffering wife who must die far from the husband she idolizes; for the

poor mother who shall never behold the object of so many tender hopes!"

But suddenly, amid the surrounding gloom which had seemed impenetrable to mortal ken, a gleam of light — an inspiration from Heaven, it seemed to the young novice — revived Matilda's hopes.

The queen noted the sudden change, so like hopefulness in the countenance of her sister, and gazed at her with anxious eyes. At a sign from the princess Berengaria dismissed her women on the pretext that she now required absolute repose.

"Speak quickly," she whispered eagerly when they were once more alone, "some new hope has suggested itself to you — I know, I feel it."

"I do hope — nay, I believe, Berengaria, that you will leave Damietta to-morrow."

"What! leave Damietta? — to-morrow? Ah, but not to go to Richard!"

"All depends upon your courage, your discretion; dressed in my novice's habit, enveloped in my heavy veil, you will depart instead of me. I will remain and wear the chains destined for your royal hands."

She spoke rapidly, as though she feared her heart might fail her for the sacrifice, and she fain would place herself beyond recall. Berengaria radiant with hope and joy, sprang up and flung her arms about her sister's neck.

"Oh, merciful heart!" she cried, "Oh, holy saint!— Surely the world hath no greater love than this!—But no, I cannot accept such heroic self-sacrifice. I cannot

abandon you to the mad passion of Malek Adhel, to the rage of the sultan when he learns the escape of his victim."

"Should all the temptations of the earth surround me, should an entire army threaten to annihilate me, still I would not fear, for the Eternal Father is my guide and my refuge!" So spoke the young girl—no longer timid, but strong and grand in the fulness of her faith:—so spoke the martyrs of old, amid the pain which tortured their bodies but weakened not the spirit of religious enthusiasm which upheld them.

"Berengaria," she continued, "there is no time for indecision. To-morrow you or I must go. It must be you—you owe it to your husband, to your subjects, whose hopes rest upon you for a successor to the throne of Richard."

As she thus combated Berengaria's irresolution Matilda was fully aware of the sacrifice she was making. If in the deepest recesses of her heart she had found a single doubt of the unselfishness of her motives, if but one thought of Malek Adhel had tempted her to remain in Damietta, her resolve would have lost its chief strength and support—the sacrifice could not have been consummated. If thoughts of Malek Adhel's love suggested themselves to her, it was but to call forth a greater amount of firmness to repel his advances.

In the meantime Berengaria reasoning within herself, yielded to the promptings of her own desires while persuading herself that she was but obeying the voice of God.

"Then be it as you will, Matilda," she answered. "I yield but half-willing consent to your persuasions, but God himself seems to speak through your lips; doubtless He desires to prove to His enemies through this miracle of self-abnegation, the power of religion—the strength which springs from a perfect faith in Him. I dare not disobey—I accept the sacrifice. I will go forth and tell the world of the saintly maiden whose name henceforth shall glorify the illustrious race of the Plantagenets."

The princess smiled softly at the queen's enthusiastic praise, smothering the sigh which betrayed, to herself at least, how human she was after all.

The day was passed in preparations for the princess' departure; her women, ignorant of the contemplated exchange, as they worked whispered sorrowfully among themselves of the disappointment which had befallen the queen.

The two sisters spent the night in prayer, in mutual interchange of loving thought, and in gaining strength for their coming separation and trials.

When the grey dawn was near, Matilda, dismissing her attendants, and desiring them to leave her alone with the queen until the last moment of departure, hastened to disguise Berengaria in her own simple habit; in its flowing draperies, beneath the jealous folds of the long, ample veil, with the white virginal band which effectually repressed every truant wave of the queen's dark tresses, the disguise was complete — impenetrable.

Then the young novice proceeded to array herself

in the rich robes of the queen, sighing involuntarily for those she had relinquished.

But the shadows of the night were already passing away, the wind was rising and filling the sails of the waiting vessel, the sound of voices and footsteps approaching the palace announced that the hour of parting had come.

Berengaria turned white with an agitation she could not for the moment control, the waning courage of her sister revived with the exigencies of the moment:

"Be strong for Richard's sake," she whispered, straining her to her heart: "I go to petition Heaven for your safe arrival."

The sound of approaching steps came nearer and nearer, they paused before the curtained portal. The princess hurried away to the oratory, throwing herself upon her knees in prayer before the emblem of the crucifixion. Berengaria hastily dropped her veil as the Duke of Lancaster entered, followed by the ladies-in-waiting of the princess, and the Mussulman guards.

"We only await your highness to set sail," said the duke.

Berengaria without speaking offered him her hand, half hidden in the folds of her ample sleeve.

"May I not, before leaving, present my respects to our illustrious queen?" inquired the duke.

Berengaria slowly shook her head, in token that the queen was unable to see him. The duke, in accordance with the rules of court etiquette, as well as those of common courtesy, was compelled to respect

the silence of the princess, and in silence he accompanied her to the harbor. No one suspected the deception. The queen embarked without lifting her veil. Metchoub received her as she reached the deck; slightly inclining her head in acknowledgment of his salutation, she passed him without speaking; the prince's guards retired, the anchor was raised, the sails filled, the mariners divided the billows with their glancing oars, the ship answered readily to their dexterous movements and sailed away over the sweep of waters like a bird, leaving ere long the shores of Egypt in the dim distance.

In the meanwhile the queen, pleading an illness which was not altogether feigned, remained in close retirement within the small cabin devoted to her use, only the Duke of Lancaster and her own attendants being permitted to enter. They learned with joy of their queen's escape, and sedulously guarded her against all accidents which might betray her identity.

Metchoub, inaccessible to any sentiment of pity, and indifferent to everything save the strict fulfilment of his orders, made no attempt to visit his prisoner; not a doubt or suspicion troubled his mind, and already the vessel was entering the harbor of Ptolemaïs.

Shortly his astonished eyes were greeted with the sight of the Queen of England clasped in her husband's arms.

His prey had outwitted him. A woman had dared to defy the sultan's will.

CHAPTER XV.

On parting from Berengaria Matilda had hastened to conceal at once her grief and her identity within the privacy of her oratory. She had remained there several hours, too much absorbed in prayers for her sister's safety to consider for the present the perils of her own situation. Finally Hermione, Countess of Leicester, the most faithful friend of the princesses, anxious to offer the queen comfort in her distress and alarmed by her prolonged absence, ventured to enter the oratory. Matilda, still kneeling, without raising her head signed to the countess to close the door. Then she arose and stood confessed before her astonished friend.

"Silence!" whispered the princess, "to your faithful care I entrust a secret of vital importance; were it suspected to-day, a swift vessel would be despatched for the queen, who would be brought back only to die. Countess of Leicester, I charge you to ward from me all prying eyes. Announce that the queen is ill; who will doubt it, after all she has suffered? To-morrow, if the prince returns to Damietta and requests an audience with the queen, it will be too late; my sister will be beyond recall. And as for me, O merciful God, Thou wilt sustain me!"

Notwithstanding her firm reliance upon Divine protection, it was but natural that the princess' thoughts,

now that comparative safety was secured the queen, should revert to the difficulties which surrounded herself. She could not ignore the effect of her unexpected presence upon the prince, she must anticipate — and in anticipating, prepare for the consequences of her act; but her sensitive modesty repelled the vague, confused, yet anxious suggestions which prudence ever and anon advanced. New and strange speculations presented themselves to her thoughts — encouraged, not repelled as formerly; for alone, surrounded by dangers, she must learn their nature in order to defend herself against them. So, amid reveries and anxious meditations she passed the day and watched far into the night, now blushing as she sounded depths beyond the ken of innocence; anon alarmed lest she comprehended too little to secure herself against the ills which might threaten her.

Two days had passed since the departure of the queen, and Malek Adhel was still absent from Damietta. The Countess of Leicester had faithfully guarded the secret entrusted to her keeping; not a suspicion of the queen's escape had been awakened. Joy once more reigned in Agnes's jealous heart but it was not for long.

On the third day the city resounded with the clash of arms, the noise of military music: Malek Adhel was reëntering Damietta with fresh troops. Unwilling to lose a day, lest in moments of repose the image of Matilda should regain its irresistible influence over him, he hastened his departure for the scene of action; ordering his galley to be held in readiness to convey him

to Cairo on the morrow, he sent to request a moment's audience of the queen.

Hermione hastened to warn the princess of Malek Adhel's approach. Matilda trembled violently, forgetting in this supreme moment all she had intended saying, and losing the calm self-possession so necessary in this emergency, for which she had so long and so painfully striven. She was struck with a sudden terror at the thought of her complete isolation, without one friend near to whom she could look for counsel or protection. She must rely solely upon God; and she felt she could best meet the impending trial in her oratory, surrounded by the emblems of her faith.

Throwing a thick veil over her head, the young girl knelt before the queen's crucifix and gazed upon the image of her Saviour,— seeking strength to endure, since the cup might not be taken from her lips.

While she thus awaited his coming, Malek Adhel had entered the palace, and passing through the jasper saloon proceeded to the queen's private boudoir where, since her illness, Berengaria had been in the habit of receiving him. Every object that met his sight reminded him of Matilda, recalled the blissful moments he had spent in her presence. Once more thoughts of his lost love came to weaken the courage acquired by such severe conflicts; once more love resumed supreme empire over his heart.

Hermione conducted him in silence to the oratory. It was the first time he had entered, and he hesitated at the threshold. But the Countess of Leicester, parting

the curtains, pronounced his name; Matilda, without rising, made a sign that she was ready to receive her visitor; and as the prince advanced to salute her, Hermione retired.

The prince did not recognize Matilda dressed as she was in the habiliments of the queen; her face, half concealed in the shadow of her veil, rested in an attitude of dejection in her open palm; he perceived nothing to awaken his suspicions. Bowing before her, Malek Adhel seated himself at a respectful distance, with intuitive delicacy forbearing to fix his eyes with too prying a gaze upon a grief of which he accused himself of being to some extent the author.

"Surely your majesty will do me the justice to believe how unwillingly I have caused you this severe disappointment," he said anxiously: "it will be only a transitory one, however; it will not be long ere you are reunited to your noble husband; *you* are not separated forever from the object of your love; *your* grief will not be an eternal one!"

He stopped abruptly, his voice husky with suppressed feeling, his lip quivering with pain. His agitation redoubled the young girl's alarm; what might she not expect from the sudden reaction from such profound despair to the ecstatic joy of beholding her once more. She could not summon strength to answer him. He, misinterpreting her silence, continued:

"Forgive me, your majesty, for intruding my own personal troubles upon your grief; let us speak only of yourself — of sorrows which will find a happy ending.

I will conduct you to-morrow to Cairo; there, in the palace of the caliphs, you will be as free as here. Immediately on our arrival I shall assemble my troops and rejoin the sultan; I shall obtain your release, and you will hasten to your husband. You will see her who has gone from my sight forever. Will you speak of me, sometimes, madam? Will she deign to listen with some slight token of interest? Tell her she has carried with her all the happiness, the hopes, the ambition of my life. Tell her I go forth to battle resolved to rid myself of existence—an empty husk from which the sweet kernel of hope and love has been stolen!"

The more thoughts of his lost love were permitted and encouraged, the more the moral courage he had summoned for the sacrifice ebbed away. He bowed his head upon his clasped hands and sighed deeply.

The princess, moved with infinite pity, and repressing with difficulty the quick-springing tears, rose, and flinging aside her veil, stood before him.

With a loud cry of mingled surprise and joy, Malek Adhel sprang to his feet.

"It is useless to deceive you longer, my lord . . ." She could not continue; for his burning eyes fixed upon hers, his attitude of intent listening—to a voice he had deemed silenced to him forever,—confused and troubled her.

For a moment he stood before her with bated breath and throbbing pulse, his lips half parted, his eyes like smouldering coals of fire; then suddenly, as though his mind had but just discerned and separated the reality of

her presence from the vision which was ever before his thoughts, he dropped upon his knee before her, and with his adoring gaze still fixed upon the beloved face, he cried:

"Oh, Matilda — light of my soul — star of my destiny, some pity, then, has come to answer the imploring cry of my great love! You have remained to save a life devoted to love and you!"

With downcast eyes and humble voice, the young girl answered:

"The queen was about to die, my lord; I resolved to save her at any cost. For her sake I remained, and allowed her, disguised in my novice's garb, to depart in my place. Open my prison doors, I implore you; let me return to my cloister's peaceful seclusion; I have fulfilled the duty Richard's love and Berengaria's sufferings claimed from me — let me now depart in peace."

Malek Adhel still gazed at her with looks of ineffable tenderness; but now an expression of sadness mingled with that of his happiness.

"You wish to fill my cup of happiness with the bitterness of cruel words," he murmured, "but your very presence is an all-potent antidote. I thought you lost to me forever — and you are beside me; tell me of your indifference, assure me of your hatred — I will not believe you — I *will* be happy."

"My lord," interrupted the princess with all the severity of manner she could summon, "I would fain believe that you will not take advantage of my isolation to press upon me a sentiment which can but offend and humiliate me."

As she spoke Malek Adhel drew nearer, and taking her unwilling hand in his, replied:

"Matilda, I can, and do, vow to ever respect your purity and innocence; but never to cease to love you, nor to forbear pleading the cause of that love. Henceforth I shall make no effort to silence the voice of my passion. Destiny, in compelling you to remain against your wish — despite my own unwilling commands, proclaims her inalterable decree; our lives must blend forevermore in one happy union of mutual love!"

"What dare you contemplate?" cried the young girl, terrified.

"I dare believe," he said, pressing the hand he held to his heart, "I dare believe that my attentions, my devotion, my prayers, will some day soften your heart towards me. I dare hope that you will not always refuse to become the wife of him who so loves you!"

"Your wife! I!" interrupted the princess shuddering. "Horrible blasphemy! Oh, my God, forgive him, he knows not what he says!"

"Listen!" said Malek Adhel gravely; "so great is my love for you, that you can no more understand than I can give expression to it. Your armies, your kindred, your God, my brother even, could not intervene to separate us. You must be mine. Yet I will respect your faith, I have no desire to change your belief; remain a Christian — but give me your love! Endow me with the rich guerdon of your beauty, your grace, your divine purity — that purity which is at once my bane and my delight, and which in an instant

tames impulses which not another power on earth could subdue!"

Such completeness of love astonished the young girl; she could have opposed to the frenzied violence of passion, the strength of that purity he invoked; but she had no shield against a sentiment at once so tender and so full of respect; her moistened eyes lost their severity, emotions hitherto unknown enthralled her, but their very novelty alarmed her; ere she could listen to their alluring voices she must show them to that Divine Source, where she was wont to subject for approval every thought of her innocent heart.

"My lord," she said, "to-morrow I shall be ready to accompany you to Cairo; but if it is true that my wishes have any influence over you, leave me now, I pray you, leave me at once."

"It is your will?"

She nodded assent.

He rose and walked towards the door. On the threshold he paused once more.

"Listen, Matilda; you witnessed the despair that overwhelmed me when I entered here; you beheld the excess of joy with which I recognized you, the transports which thrilled me, the respect which held them in check; have not such powerful and varied emotions proved to you that never love equalled mine? Will you not welcome this thought to your heart when I am no longer at your side to plead my cause?"

He disappeared; and the young girl, like one under a spell, could not but obey him. Although she could

not contemplate without horror the union which the prince so ardently desired, still her thoughts ever turned with a sweet, new pleasure, to the sentiments of tenderness he had avowed. She believed, as he had bidden her to believe, that never mortal man had loved with a love like his. What unsuspected dangers lay in the thought! How difficult to guard a heart — the purest, the most humble, from the promptings of a tender pride at the thought of being the object of a supreme passion.

The princess sighed, wept — and love now mingled in her sighs, her tears. The prompt obedience of her warrior-lover touched her inexpressibly; she built upon it a sense of security; since a word, a sign, sufficed to send him from her, why dread his approach? Thus she reasoned within herself, encouraging thoughts which to-day seemed so innocent, but which would have shocked her with a sense of guilt on her first arrival in Damietta.

But it was Matilda's first attempt to extenuate her faults, and conscience is very quick to give warning of a first offence. While she endeavored to lull her fears with a false sense of security, her unrest only increased; the peace which had reigned within her had deserted its throne, leaving it a prey to vague fears and deceptive illusions.

Bewildered by an agitation of mind which her sursoundings would seem to soothe, she sought in the Word of God some remedy for her trouble. But in vain she endeavored to fix her mind upon the healthful counsels she sought; love would not be denied.

Presently her wandering eyes fell upon this passage, enchaining her attention:

"The security of the wicked is born of their vanity: but in the end they will find themselves deceived."

"Oh, my God!" she cried in alarm, "is it to me Thou speakest? Is my security, then, born of my vanity?"

A prying zephyr turned the leaf, and she read again:

"Circumstance does not render us weak; it shows us, only, how weak we are."

Again she paused, recalling the emotions she had experienced while listening to the avowal of the prince's passion. She turned once more to her book and read:

"After the anger of kings, the depths of the sea, and the lightning of the tempest, that of which thou shouldst most beware is thine own heart."

She would not stop here to examine her heart's innermost recesses, sure of there finding the image it was her duty to banish, but passed on hastily to the next lines:

"It is easier to conquer an enemy by closing against him all the entrances of the soul; and by repulsing him ere he enter."

She closed her book then with a firmer resolve.

"With all my strength, O Heavenly Father," she cried, "will I strive to repulse this enemy so fatal to my peace; whatever weakness his seductive powers may develop within me shall at least be concealed from his sight; always stern and repellent, I will close my ear to his pleading, my heart to his love. I only ask

Thee that my trial may end quickly; would that present and future might be cancelled and that the hour of my death were at hand!"

CHAPTER XVI.

On leaving the queen's oratory Malek Adhel's countenance was radiant as with a great joy. Those who had seen him enter gloomy and dispirited, marvelled at the change; a thousand conjectures were formed, none approaching the truth which the prince kept closely concealed within his own heart.

Before declaring the happy deception which had been practised upon him he wished to examine into the situation, and decide upon some plan of action. It was his chief and irrevocable resolution never to renounce Matilda. Whether it was that he failed to appreciate the entire self-abnegation of the young girl in the sacrifice she had made in remaining, or whether his penetrating eye, taught by love, had discerned some latent sentiment which she herself had ignored, he refused to believe that Matilda would have willingly remained in Damietta had her heart been as averse as her religion to his love. If he could but succeed in gaining the one, he felt secure of the sacrifice of the other. With a future so full of promise before him, he no longer hesitated. His will now became the ally of his love, and the will which had once known how to conquer for a time love such as his was no feeble one.

As fatalists abandon themselves to the guidance of Destiny, so he gave himself up to the promptings of Love.

But although Love had obtained chief rule over him, fraternal affection was not forgotten.

Saladin, unwilling to engage in battle in his absence, awaited him; upon his timely arrival, perhaps, depended the fate of the empire. He must not linger. But should the princess accompany him? Would he dare risk this, his chief treasure, in such near proximity to the camp of her people? Yet, to leave her in Egypt would entail a separation for which he now had not sufficient courage. Still, such separation could be but temporary, and would allow no possibility of rescue. He must decide, and quickly, the brother of Saladin could countenance no weakness in the lover of Matilda.

Finally his decision was formed. He would depart on the morrow for Cairo, taking the Princess of England with him; there, where her personal appearance was not known, her identity and the escape of the queen would not be suspected until the sultan had been duly apprised of the deception which had been practised. In the meantime his beloved should be surrounded by a trusty guard, and while she remained in peaceful security in the vast palace of the caliphs, he would march toward Kouroutba to the assistance of his brother, and thus faithful to duty, his future meed of happiness would be but the sweeter for delay.

The moment his decision was made Malek Adhel issued his orders of preparation; his troops, commanded by one of his most efficient officers, marched towards

Pharamia, there to await his arrival a few days later, with other troops from Cairo.

Hope had restored to his person all its native grandeur of aspect, while love and happiness so irradiated his countenance that even rough men could not refrain from marvelling at his manly beauty, while they gave his invincible valor the full meed of admiration.

In the meantime Agnes, unremitting in her vigilance, had learned from her spies that the prince, overwhelmed with gloom on his return to Damietta, had experienced, at one word from the queen, a most wondrous change. She was informed that he would leave on the morrow for Cairo, and that Berengaria would accompany him thither; but that notwithstanding the celerity with which his preparations had been made, and the forced marches required of his troops, he had such important intelligence for the sultan that he could not defer communicating it until their meeting, but would despatch a messenger before nightfall to Kouroutba.

These tidings surprised Agnes and awakened her suspicions; jealousy suggested to her the same thought with which magnanimity had inspired Matilda, and she determined to solve the doubt without delay. She immediately proceeded to the queen's apartments and requested an audience.

Hermione prevented her entrance, assuring her that her royal mistress was too feeble and unwell to admit visitors. Agnes incredulously replied that the queen had certainly been able to receive the prince, and would be sufficiently recovered, so she had been in-

formed, to travel on the morrow. To every argument the Countess of Leicester opposed only the commands of her royal mistress, and Amaury's daughter, baffled but not deceived, desisted from further attempts to intrude upon the privacy of the queen's apartments, and retired, filled with jealousy and rage, to her own. Her suspicions were now fully confirmed, it only remained to learn to what extent Malek Adhel was concerned in the plot. She did not hesitate to use for his betrayal the very gifts with which he had once overwhelmed her, and gave the slave all her jewels in exchange for the prince's letter to his brother.

"I wished to obey your instructions, Brother," so the letter ran; "but destiny doubtless ordained otherwise, for they were not fulfilled. Allah forbade that I should renounce my beloved, or forfeit my pledged word to the Queen of England. During my absence, Metchoub, charged, according to your directions, to execute your orders, was deceived. He is in no wise culpable in the matter — nor am I. This I trust to be able to prove to you shortly by retaking Ptolemaïs, and laying at your feet the keys of this gem of the Orient."

"I was not deceived, then," cried Agnes, her livid face, her unsteady voice, betraying the demons warring in her breast. Then she was silent, pondering her means of revenge. The slave, securing the rich booty, the price of his treachery, requested the return of the papers entrusted to him.

"Never," cried Agnes imperiously; "go seek an

asylum at Antioch, there Malek Adhel's vengeance will never reach you!"

The trembling slave hastily obeyed, while the too-trusting prince believed him already far on his road to Saladin.

Once more alone, Amaury's daughter gave free play to her fury; she craved arms — she must have arms to avenge her wrongs. Versed in the arts of fascination, she had little difficulty in obtaining from one of the palace guards a helmet and shield, and, what she prized still more, the poniard with which she should pierce the heart of her hated rival.

She gloated in the display of her weapons spread before her; secure of revenge, and confident that Matilda would not accompany her recreant lover from Damietta.

CHAPTER XVII.

MATILDA was still ignorant of the plans of the prince. Whether he would remain with her in Cairo, or compel her to follow him into Syria, she knew not, but both alternatives were equally distasteful; no arrangement would satisfy her, except a separation from Malek Adhel. The most repulsive prison seemed to her preferable to the mysterious dangers, the seductive temptations, which in turn attracted, alarmed, yet insensibly gained upon her.

At break of day Malek Adhel hastily entered the

saloon where Hermione, assisted by the queen's women, was engaged in preparations for departure, and requested admittance to the queen's presence. The countess referred him to the oratory. There he found Matilda, and confided to her his reasons for the retention of her disguise. She listened approvingly, but answered:

"Why rebel, oh, Prince, against the sultan's will. He had forbidden the departure of the queen, yet Berengaria has gone, but he had also ordered mine, and by acquiescing in this respect, you will prove to your brother that in all things under your control, you submit to his authority. Ah, why, more cruel than Saladin himself, will you detain me here, when he permits my departure?"

"Matilda," replied the young Saracen: "never was woman as cruel as you, your heart is alike inaccessible to pity and to love; finding it impossible to escape me you strive to place between us a barrier of hate. Whatever be your determination, at least know this: you shall never more behold your brother, and while this heart beats with life and love you shall never leave this empire. Console yourself, however, with the assurance that I shall not remain with you in Cairo. My country and Saladin need me; the moment I shall have attended to your comfort and welfare in the palace of the caliphs, I shall fly to the field of battle."

"Oh, unhappy Christians!" cried the weeping girl. "Oh, my brother, my brave Richard, have we then bidden each other an eternal farewell? Must you fall beneath the sword of an implacable enemy?"

"Is it I of whom you speak thus, Matilda?" rejoined Malek Adhel, "I, who would die to spare you a tear! Rest assured, my well-beloved, that should your brother challenge me, 'twill not be he who will fall; should his days be threatened, amid scenes of bloodshed and carnage, my heart shall serve him as a shield. But, Matilda," he added, throwing himself at her feet, "when I shall have purchased your brother's life with my own, will you not deign to shed on my pulseless corpse tears of pity which neither my love nor my despair have been able to win from you?"

With his sorrowful, loving eyes searching into her own, with those accents of tender pleading appealing, with irresistible eloquence, to every feminine sentiment within her, Matilda's strength to repel him seemed ebbing away. He asked only her pity, could her heart's innermost recesses have been unfolded to his reading, neither pity nor yet love would he have required of her, but in the full perfection of content would have blessed high Heaven — asking nothing.

Standing before him, leaning her head against the back of the queen's great arm-chair, the young girl was endeavoring to conceal tears which might betray to her lover at once her weakness and her heart. On his knee beside her, Malek Adhel the warrior, like the lowliest suppliant, silently awaited her answer.

Suddenly a terrible noise resounded near by; piercing shrieks issued from the adjoining apartments, the curtains of the portal were rudely thrust aside, and a warrior in full armor, with drawn sword, dashed into

the room and rushed towards the Princess of England. Without arms wherewith to defend her, the prince could but give his life — he gave it gladly, he threw himself before his beloved, but the arm which threatened Matilda had not strength to reach the heart of Malek Adhel; the wound was trifling, but blood flowed freely. The princess, her white robes crimsoned with the blood shed in her defence, believing the blow a fatal one, lost all consciousness, and would have fallen to the floor but for the ready arm always on the watch to do her service.

Following closely upon the footsteps of Agnes, came the Countess of Leicester, who, perceiving her mistress' plight flew to give her aid. Placing the unconscious form of her he loved in the arms of her faithful friend, Malek Adhel hastily quitted the room in search of the aggressor.

Wounded and unarmed he rushed upon the unsuspected foe. Agnes stepped aside.

"Stand on your guard!" she cried, presenting her naked blade; "you will find this arm neither a feeble nor a merciful one!"

At the sound of her familiar voice, he shuddered.

"Wretched woman..." he cried.

"Wretched, indeed!" she echoed fiercely, "wretched insomuch that she has failed in her revenge! But other means are still left me."

She hastily left the room, and the prince, urging the countess to keep strict watch over her mistress, followed Agnes' footsteps, in order to prevent the accomplishment of her baneful designs.

On recovering consciousness, Matilda found herself on the queen's bed, Hermione close by, and several of the women of the household ministering to her needs. Her vacant eyes roved in vain questioning from face to face, from object to object, but presently they rested upon the crimson that stained the purity of her white robes, and with a sudden shock the fearful scene upon which her eyes had last rested was present to her re-awakened memory.

"Does he still live?" she questioned anxiously.

Tearfully, and with some reluctance, the countess replied that the prince, wounded, but not seriously so, was at that moment engaged in fight.

"What enemies can he have — he who rules supreme in this city?" asked the princess.

"Ah, madam," replied Hermione, "the woman to whom your kind charity gave shelter, that passionate, violent Agnes, is the cause of the sedition which has arisen in this city. With sword in one hand, a letter of Malek Adhel's in the other, she announced to the troops and to the people that Saladin's orders had been scorned, that the queen had escaped, and that you still remained in Damietta; that betrayed by your artifices, the sultan, Egypt, in short the empire itself, were as playthings in the hands of a vile Christian. She went further, and declared that the prince, captive to your powers of fascination, is on the eve of betraying his country, and that only your removal can restore him to honor and duty. Her excited harangue, her furious imprecations, stirred up the populace, and they followed

her to the very doors of this palace, demanding your life; the prince, armed *cap-á-pié*, defends the entrance."

"Ah, haste, Countess, tell him to leave me to my fate — he must not expose his life for mine."

"No one is permitted to pass beyond the inner doors of the palace," replied Hermione; "the prince, doubtless considering the measure necessary to your highness' safety, has placed a strong guard at the outer gates, with orders to refuse both egress and ingress to all applicants."

"Is it certain, at least, that his wound is not mortal?" the princess again asked tearfully.

"If the blow had struck your heart, at which it was aimed," answered the countess turning pale at the thought, "it must necessarily have been fatal, but love enfeebled Agnes' arm when it had to strike through the prince's breast to reach yours."

"How say you? The blow was aimed at *my* life?"

"Aye, your highness; the prince saved it at the peril of his own."

"He saved my life!" cried the young girl warmly, "you say he saved my life at the peril of his own, Countess of Leicester?"

Inexpressibly touched by this new and strongest token of his love for her, she could say no more, but kept silence for several moments, pondering these things within her own mind.

"The sun seems high in the heavens, Hermione," she said, after awhile, "is it long since the enacting of that fearful scene?"

"Several hours, your highness; it is already long past noon."

"And there are no means of ascertaining whether the prince is safe?"

Hermione shook her head sadly.

"None, Princess; the prince's orders were imperative."

"Then the will of God be done; we must wait."

The princess arose, pale and feeble; at the sight of the bloodstains upon her dress she shuddered.

"For Heaven's sake," she cried, "remove these fearful signs!"

Hermione brought another of the queen's dresses; but the princess insisted upon resuming her novice's habit.

"There is no further need of concealment now," she said; "I am at liberty to exchange these rich robes and insignia of royalty for my own humble vestments."

But her novice's garb did not bring the peace of mind she had hoped to resume with it; this latest proof of the great love of Malek Adhel had shown her, like an open book, the unread pages of her heart; she knew now how dear he was to her; and while his life was even yet being exposed for hers, she dared not regret her inability to deny him the one gift he craved.

At midnight, while the princess was still interceding in earnest prayer for the safety of her defender, the Duke of Norfolk came to announce the conclusion of the seditious movement among the people.

"Quiet once more prevails," he said; "the prince appeared before the populace, and without the shedding

of one drop of blood — at the mere sight of him they so love to honor, the influence of a jealous woman vanished."

"We had been informed that bloodshed and carnage ruled without; is it not so, Countess of Leicester?"

"Such were the tidings I announced to your highness; I was so informed by a slave who entered the gates as the guard was being stationed."

"Matters looked threatening enough, truly," replied the duke; "if tumult and the maddest imprecations had power to wound, the streets would have run blood. As it is, no infidel blood has been spilled; and the Princess of Jerusalem, baffled in her evil designs, has disappeared; she has been sought far and wide throughout the city, but no traces of her can be discovered."

"And the prince . . ." interrupted Matilda, "he was grievously wounded; do they fear for his life?"

"If he never receives wounds more severe," replied the duke, "Christianity might well regret that the hand of Agnes had not displayed more strength."

"Shame, my lord duke!" cried the princess indignantly. "Would you desire that a hero should perish by the hand of an assassin?"

"Had I been near him in the moment of danger," replied the duke, "I would willingly have risked my few remaining years in his defence; but I cannot forget, nor can your highness, that to the arm of this mighty warrior is due the fall of Jerusalem, the weakening of the cause of Christ upon earth; that all his powers, and

they are by no means to be despised, are concentrated upon this one chief object, the destruction of our faith. Should we not then bless that day which witnesses the death of the most potent enemy of religion?"

Matilda vouchsafed no answer, and the duke, with a low obeisance, quitted her presence.

She was alone once more; but what changes the words to which she had been listening had wrought. But a moment since, Heaven had seemed to approve the sentiments of gratitude which had filled her heart; she had dared to offer up her innocent prayers for the safety of him who had shed his blood in her defence; and now she was reminded that to this object of her kindly, nay, almost loving thoughts, was due the chief disasters which had befallen Christianity. The enemy of her brothers, of her God, was enshrined — its chief idol — within her heart, and would not be chidden thence. The shadows of the night surrounded her; but her mind was groping in shadows far more impenetrable. In her trouble she cried out:

"Forgive, O my God, the sinful thoughts which crowd upon me; deliver me from the terrors which surround me; I am so weak, and this human love is stronger than my will. Let me suffer, if such be my deserts, but let me not succumb to the delusive charms of Thine enemy!"

Throwing herself upon her knees before the crucifix surmounting her *prie-dieu*, she continued in broken accents:

"Oh, Thou, who sayest unto the sea, 'be still,' and

unto the tempest, 'hold thy breath,' quiet my spirit's tumultuous impulse; give me back the peace I have exchanged for this unholy love!"

But in vain she invoked the aid of Heaven, when thoughts of him she loved mingled with every prayer; when the image of her wounded lover — wounded for her — ever came before her, as she gazed upon that of her Saviour stretched upon the cross.

Vainly she sought refuge in sleep; in dreams he was still present, tender, importunate; and no longer, as in hours of conscious reason, had she strength to hide from him that love which it was sin to reveal. Awake — he was still before her troubled thoughts; there was no escape; the voice of his love called unto her, and would not be denied. Yet, though love after a hard siege had gained her heart, religion held firm sway over her will. Her Heavenly Father had withdrawn His protecting arm from about her; even man had deserted her in her hour of sorest need; yet would she cling, in fulness of faith, to the one refuge that had never before deserted her; surely prayer, fervent, earnest prayer, must open to her at last the paths of peace. So had the good abbess assured her, so had the Archbishop of Tyre promised. The archbishop, her friend, her counsellor — were he but here to guide her amid the surrounding darkness! She paused, struck with a sudden recollection which brought with it a sense of hopefulness and peace; the archbishop, in anticipation of such an hour of trial, had recommended to her the wise counsels of a pious cenobite. Without a moment's

hesitation she took solemn vows to make a pilgrimage to the hermit's retreat.

The prince had now completed his preparations for leaving Damietta. He took small account of his wound, but he had somewhat changed his plans, and no longer thought of leaving Matilda at Cairo. He feared for her the superstitious fury of an unreasoning populace, and could know peace of mind only when she was beside him. What mattered to him the near vicinity of the Christian camp? Invincible until now, would his arm grow weaker in defence of his treasure? From Cairo, where he must assemble the remainder of his troops, he would conduct her to Suez where the main body of his army awaited him. But as on her account he would be compelled to make less rapid progress, and knowing that, through the treachery of his slave, Agnes had intercepted his letter to Saladin, he prepared another, adding to the contents of the former, an account of the perfidy of Amaury's daughter, and of the revolt in Damietta. Entrusting his despatches to one of his most faithful followers, he sought some hours of rest ere the break of day would allow him to seek the Princess of England to acquaint her with his newly-formed plans.

He had caused strict search to be made throughout the city for the wretched Agnes, but the vindictive woman perceiving the failure of her evil designs had disappeared. In complete armor and mounted on a swift horse, she was already far on her way towards Kouroutba, cogitating some new plan of action through

which she might effect the downfall of her rival and her recreant lover.

While she pursued her way, plunged in profound thought, a man mounted on a light-footed camel overtook her. She recognized him at a glance as Malek Adhel's most faithful follower.

"Where are you going?" she cried furiously.

Without replying, he increased his speed. She buried her spurs in the flanks of her steed and hurried in pursuit.

"Deliver what thou bearest, or defend thy life!" she cried.

He raised his lance, she poised her javelin, and the Mussulman fell to the ground a victim to his fidelity.

The pitiless Agnes snatched the coveted despatches from his bosom, and exultant at her unexpected good fortune, pursued her way towards Kouroutba.

In the meantime Malek Adhel was disclosing to the Princess of England his fears concerning her safety, and his consequent change of plan in taking her with him to Kouroutba instead of leaving her in Cairo.

She listened in silence, moved less by his words than by the pallor of his countenance, but the more emotion she experienced, the more firmly she insisted upon the fulfilment of her vow.

"My lord," she said, "go where destiny calls you, but leave me in Cairo."

In vain he expostulated with her, depicting the dangers to which she would be exposed from the fury of a fanatical populace when he should be no longer

near to defend her. In vain he pleaded the anxiety which would be his portion away from her. She gravely interrupted him:

"My lord, you have proved how severely God punishes an unhallowed love. With your blood you have expiated past sin and folly—should you persist, life itself may be the penalty. Ah, compel me not to mourn through all eternity, perhaps, the fate of him to whom I owe my life!"

At the thought, all her weakness returned.

"Go on, Matilda," said the prince, "make me regret not having fallen beneath Agnes' murderous assault!"

The princess with an effort restrained her agitation, and assuming a severity she was far from feeling, continued:

"Debarred for so long a time from the altars of my God, deprived of the sacred manna with which He nourishes His children, ignorant of the time when, my exile at an end, I may once more worship in His sanctuary, I desire to purify myself from the stains I must have incurred during my enforced stay among infidels. On the shores of the Red Sea is a ruined monastery, where a follower of Basil — one who has had a world at his feet — lives unknown of men, but not of God. There my vows call me. There your wretched captive asks your permission to make a pilgrimage."

Malek Adhel listened with undisguised astonishment.

"Matilda," he said, "are you aware of the dangers which will encompass you, of the obstacles which will

arise to oppose your undertaking? Do you know that between Cairo and your place of destination is a vast arid desert of burning sand, frequented by undisciplined soldiers and roving Arabs?"

"God, who reads my heart, will protect me," the young girl answered, with fervid faith. "This vast plain I wish to traverse is a desert only to the unfaithful, to the true believer it is peopled with the descendants of Anthony of Pacome; it is filled with the immensity of the God of Jacob, who never deserts His children in their hour of need!"

Malek Adhel gazed at the princess with increasing surprise. He could not conceive of such courage in a young and timid girl. Had he imagined that it was not religion alone which inspired it, but dread of the greater perils to which her own heart subjected her, he would have marvelled still more.

"Princess," he said, "even were I at liberty to accompany you on this perilous route, I should still refuse to allow you to expose yourself to the innumerable dangers which infest those solitary regions."

"Ah," she interrupted,-"you would know no fear, if, like me, you knew the power of God. His arm, unaided, will uphold me, and when He calls me to Himself, I shall welcome the summons with joy!"

The fearless faith which shone in her beautiful eyes, the enthusiasm which irradiated her face, convinced Malek Adhel of the futility of further efforts of dissuasion, and he resolved to defer giving a positive refusal to her request until after their arrival in Cairo.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE following morning, just as the pearly-tipped fingers of the dawn were parting the dusky shadows of the night, and the shrill cries of the sailors announced the preparations for an early departure, the Princess of England, accompanied by the Duke of Gloucester, Hermione Countess of Leicester, and a few English officers of the queen's suite, arrived on the bank of the Nile. The little party of Christians entered the galley lying ready close to the shore. The prince had already preceded them, and saluting his captives with a courtesy he might have shown guests of high distinction, he led the princess to a pavilion of cloth of gold, carpeted with the richest tapestries from the looms of Persia. Here, seating her among luxurious cushions, he placed himself beside her.

The princess, silent and entranced as though by some spell of enchantment, gazed upon the slowly-flitting scene of this Delta, so celebrated under the empire of the Pharaohs for its rich fertility, its tropical loveliness of aspect. The sun was lazily raising his great golden-red head above the distant horizon of the sea; the heavy dews which had fallen during the night had refreshed the parched earth; the skies were blue and cloudless; the air was fragrant with the breath of flowers; flocks of birds of gorgeous plumage flitted hither and thither among the foliage of the date trees, and

white doves cooed a soft reveille to their birdlings in the scented orange-groves; myriads of pigeons poised and fluttered among the reeds bordering the river's edge, seeking their food. The sycamore twined her graceful arms with those of the tamarind and the yellow-flowering acacia; beyond towered the date, bending its haughty head beneath the weight of thickly-clustering fruit; anon appeared the golden balls of the citron and the orange swinging to and fro in the morning breeze and shaking perfume from the white blossoms that crowned them. Here and there were shady groves of the broad-leaved plantain, offering shelter to the swarthy laborer resting from his toil; nearer the water's edge the scarlet-flowering pomegranate revelled unabashed in the first glances of the ardent sun; while reposing upon the bosom of the mighty river, pure and serene amid her broad green leaves, floated the glorious queen of aquatic vegetation, the white lily of the Nile.

All nature seemed gladdened by its baptism of refreshing rest, and gathering unto itself peace and strength to endure the heat and weariness of the coming day; and why should not she, too, God's dearest creature, rest and enjoy after the dangerous temptations which had been resisted, the weary strife wherein she had conquered, and gain strength and peace for the trials that still lay in wait for her?

And so the morning hours lagged slowly by, the sun in the zenith of his glory, enthroned in the midst of the heavens, darted his burning rays upon the smiling face of nature. The zephyrs hushed their whispered

songs, the foliage, unfanned by cool breezes, drooped wearily; the dancing waves were stilled; the sailors plied their heavy oars with lessening energy; the galley moved listlessly over the glassy surface of the waters; all sought shelter from the burning heat, and slumber soon succeeded to the stupor produced by the heavy atmosphere.

Only Matilda and the prince kept vigil; while perfect repose reigned around them, they alone were victims of unrest.

The young novice had been careful to conceal herself as effectually as possible behind the folds of her ample veil; the white band had been lowered upon her brow, her delicate hands sought shelter within the large sleeves of her habit. Had she but known how her modest reserve heightened the effect of her beauty, she would have given less thought to her simple toilet, and cared less to hide those charms to which her lover's fancy lent new graces.

She had placed herself as far as possible from Malek Adhel. With clasped hands, and eyes raised to the blue skies above, she was busily recalling her wandering thoughts from earthly things, and endeavoring to prepare them for the reception of divine inspiration.

The prince gazed upon her beauty with increasing passion — content at first to gaze unrepelled; then, drawn as by invisible spells, he approached nearer; he dared not touch so much as a fold of her jealous veil, yet his heart beat violently and fire coursed through his burning veins. Matilda kept silence, recalling the vow

she had registered to brave all dangers in order to escape that which threatened her from a love her religion could never sanction; then followed thoughts of the eternal separation she contemplated, of the despair of him to whom she owed her life, and her heart was softened; for the first time she began to ask herself whether duty claimed from her the sacrifice of a happiness which was dearer to her than her own—dearer, alas! than all else save the approval of her conscience and of her God.

All seemed to conspire to overthrow her better resolves; gratitude, pity, love itself, whispered to her heart in tones of entreaty the name of Malek Adhel; the voluptuous, perfume-laden air enthralled her senses, the tender instincts of submissive womanhood gained upon the sterner attribute of reason. She sighed, and turned her face away from the one object on earth which was at once dearest and most dangerous to her peace; wondering how happiness so exquisite could thus be mingled with suffering almost beyond endurance.

Nearer and nearer came her lover; without turning her face towards him, she was conscious of his lightest movement; she could feel his burning gaze seeking her own, his quick, hot breath upon her cheek; her innocence marvelled at emotions so new to her—emotions which thrilled her with a sense of mingling joy and pain: all strength, all power of volition escaped her feeble grasp; her clasped hands, with an unconscious impulse, veiled eyes too candid longer to conceal the secret which burthened her throbbing heart. The

eager eyes of her lover drew quick promise from her sweet confusion; he dared to snatch one hand from its clinging mate and press it to his lips in one long, lingering, passionate kiss. Thus defrauded of their modest veil, the blue eyes bared to his profaning gaze melted into a rain of sweet, aggrieved, remorseful, yet withal love-inspired tears. Malek Adhel with her tears perceived her weakness — with an irresistible impulse he gathered her to his heart, and pressed the maiden's pure, undefiled lips to his own. The white band, detached by the movement, dropped from her brow, her beautiful blonde hair fell in golden ripples over his breast; the sacred reliquary of the abbess, loosened from the confining ribbon, lay at their feet. In this supreme moment of delirious delight she saw it, and the sight recalled her to a sense of her weakness and her sin. She repulsed him, haughtily withdrawing from his passionate caresses; remorse and indignation strove within her, terror and shame overpowered her; with uncertain steps, as of one suddenly stricken blind, she sought a remote corner of the pavilion, and gave herself up to bitter tears of humiliation and repentance.

In vain the prince sought to reassure her, in vain he pleaded for forgiveness of his offence: God alone was before her now; not the God of her childlike love and trust, but a stern and implacable Judge.

"Forgive!" she cried, unconscious in her despair that her thoughts found utterance: "Forgive O Supreme Ruler! Thou who hast witnessed my fierce struggles against this unhallowed love, judge mercifully of my

weakness! Thou who wouldst not take heed to my prayer, be not angered that without Thee I have faltered!"

Malek Adhel listened with surprise, with dread, with joy. If the princess' agitation had sometimes inspired him with hope, her silence, her severity, had still more often bidden him despair. Never had his entreaties, his respect, his submission succeeded in obtaining an avowal like this—an avowal, indeed, of weakness only; but could weakness be the reproach of indifference? Yet he could not rejoice in the full plenitude of happiness while witnessing the suffering and remorse of his beloved. Malek Adhel beheld her, pale, trembling, beside herself in her grief, and felt almost resigned to forego the hope of ever winning her love. Not daring to leave her thus, still less did he presume to approach her.

"Matilda," he said softly, "will you not hear me?"

"My God," she cried, bewildered, "his voice still follows me, I cannot escape it!"

"My beloved," he said again, "be calm; if my presence troubles you, I will leave you."

"Oh, why did I quit my peaceful cloister!" she said, without heeding him. "Before I knew him I was so happy; my heart, pure as the heavens, submissive as those of your holy angels, O my God, had never formed a thought it could blush to disclose to Thee!—Why does the infidel always follow me? Why has his impious hand dared to touch the appointed bride of Christ, and he yet live!"

"You invoke the vengeance of your God upon me, Matilda!" the prince said sorrowfully.

"Have I, indeed!" she cried despairingly. "No, no, God will not take heed of such an unnatural prayer: punish me, O Heavenly Father, but do not avenge me!"

In her softened mood Malek Adhel moved nearer to the princess.

"Matilda," he pleaded, "hear me!—Matilda, if it is true—if it is possible that you love me . . ."

She indignantly interrupted him.

"And whence the presumption, oh, Saracen, which inspires you with so vain a hope?"

"Pardon that presumption, Matilda, but hope was born unto me from your repentance; of what else save love have you to repent?"

"Ah, have I then betrayed my sin! Have I so fallen that an infidel henceforth hath the right to cause me to blush! Oh weak heart, in allowing thyself to be touched by a Saracen's prayers thou hast deserved the shame of being informed of it by him!"

Then, with drooping head and an attitude of profound humiliation she turned to him, saying:

"Let the state of utter self-condemnation in which you behold me, oh, prince, satisfy the demon of pride which dwells within you! Turn away your eyes from my misery, and do not compel me to disclose that which I can view only with horror! Let me shed my repentant tears far from him who has caused them; from this moment let there be an eternal separation between us!"

Beholding Innocence in the abject humiliation most meet for sin, Malek Adhel was moved with a sense of reverence. For the first time his bold eyes dared not meet her own, for the first time he understood that divine meekness which the Christians boasted in their Saviour, and which his warrior instincts had so oft derided. For several moments he was silent. When he spoke, though his cheek was white with the pain he could not subdue, his voice was steadied by a strong effort of his will.

"Live then in peace, noble maiden," he said, "under the wing of that God who has given strength to a sex so weak and timid. I will speak to you no more of a love which offends, it is far better that I should die than to cause you grief."

He hastily left the pavilion, and went to hide his emotion away from the sight of man.

Oh, strange fate! The moment which had given birth to the hope of being beloved, had lost to him forever that of being happy!

Attributing the princess' coldness to indifference, he had hoped to overcome it by the power of his great love; but now, when she had unwillingly acknowledged him victor of the prize he sought, Religion had stepped forth in all her stern majesty, and forbidden her to wreathe his brows with Love's guerdon.

On her arrival in Cairo the princess retired into a strict seclusion, admitting only the few Christians sojourning there, who on hearing of her arrival joyously assembled to welcome the royal maiden.

She questioned them about the dangers of the pil-

grimage she contemplated, which might well have sufficed to appall the stout heart of man, but possessed no terrors for one who feared death itself less than that sweet poison of love from which she would fain escape.

"My brethren," she said, "I have made a vow — a vow which no power on earth can revoke, I must cross the desert to seek counsel of the pious hermit who dwells on the borders of the Red Sea. Which of you, my friends, will follow me?"

"All of us," they unanimously replied.

"Then keep this matter within your own hearts," she said to them, "prepare whatever we need in secret and in silence. Ere long I will send you word of the time and place that I shall join you."

As they took leave of her the Duke of Gloucester entered the room.

"Deign to look from yonder window, your highness," he said. "On the banks of the Nile, the most formidable of the Saracen warriors is reviewing his troops. Behold their imposing array. Wretched Christians, 'tis against you their arms will be opposed!"

The princess came and stood beside the duke; at a glance she discerned, amid the Mussulman hosts, the noble presence of Malek Adhel. Mounted on his black charger, erect, yet full of native grace, his dark eyes flashing, his lips, to which love had taught so tender an expression, compressed and stern; with drawn sword he passed from rank to rank, from one division to another, reviewing with military exactitude this formidable array of warriors.

Vainly conscience urged her to repel with hate him whom these preparations avowed the bitterest enemy of her religion and her people; seeing him thus in the full panoply of majesty and manly beauty, she felt how impossible it was to obey the stern mandate.

"The prince will depart immediately then?" she asked, wishing, yet dreading an affirmative.

"No, your highness, he is not content with these innumerable hosts; he is going to Memphis and Arsinoe to gather together additional troops. He will return to-morrow, and the day following is set for the departure of the army and that of your highness. The prince gave me this letter, in which he probably advises you of his plans."

The duke placed the paper in the hands of the princess, and retired a few steps awaiting her orders after perusal.

A soft flush stained the whiteness of her brow as she read. Filled with regret for having offended her, Malek Adhel did not presume to appear in her presence. This warrior, distinguished above all others by his invincible courage, his haughtiness of mien, who seemed born to rule a world—this warrior who feared not death itself, grew abashed and humble at the thought of displeasing her.

Could human pride withstand such delicate flattery? Could human love disdain such perfection of worship? But the greater the ascendency he gained over her weakness, the more absolute seemed the necessity for flight.

"On the third day from this," he wrote, "we will depart from Cairo. I will conduct you to the court of Saladin, in that Jerusalem so dear to your pious heart. Should you so desire, I will neither see nor speak to you; I will submit to every sacrifice save that of restoring you to the Christians, and will grant your every wish except that of crossing the desert."

But Matilda's vow was far more imperative to her than the commands of the prince; and her resolution was only the more strongly confirmed by the obstacles that arose to prevent its fulfilment. Assured of the Duke of Gloucester's devotion she confided to him her intentions; and filled with admiration for the gentle firmness of Richard's sister, he begged permission to accompany the pilgrims on their pious mission.

The princess readily yielded consent, and informed him of the place where the Christians were engaged in making preparations for their departure.

"Tell them to hasten their arrangements," she said; "at nightfall, when Malek Adhel shall have left Cairo, come for me. We will join our brethren, and under the guidance of the same God, we will go forth to seek the saint from whose lips we shall gather lessons of strength and comfort."

The Duke of Gloucester departed to perform his royal mistress' behest, and Matilda, once more alone, permitted her gaze to wander unrestrained towards him whom she might perhaps never more behold. She almost dared to love him now, without consciousness of sin; for death and eternity stood between them,

levelling all distinctions, and purifying their hearts from earthly dross.

CHAPTER XIX.

In leaving Matilda for an absence of but two days, Malek Adhel was far from suspecting the flight she meditated. Though surprised that she could have conceived the bold thought of traversing the desert, he never dreamed of her taking advantage of his absence to put it into execution. A single doubt on the subject would have arrested his march towards Memphis.

At nightfall the Duke of Gloucester came to seek Matilda, and they left the city together, under pretext of visiting the little village of Matarea whose name was derived from a spring close by; where, tradition says, the holy family, flying from the persecution of Herod, once sought rest, and in whose limpid waters the Virgin Mother bathed the infant Christ.

None doubted the attraction which a spot so sacred to her faith must possess for the pious princess, nor dreamed of intercepting her progress beyond the gates of the city.

On reaching the sacred spring the princess found, with the Christian monks, a number of faithful Englishmen who had resolved to accompany her through the dangers of the desert, and three guides. Two camels, some dried fruit, a little meal, and some skins filled

with fresh water, were all they had been able to secure without awakening the suspicions of the Mussulmans.

The little party of pilgrims, ere setting forth on their journey, with one accord adjourned to a small cave hard by, where by the light of torches one of the priests of the princess' suite celebrated the holy rites of communion. The princess alone denied herself this chief comfort of her religion; in her humility deeming herself unworthy to taste of the divine manna until her sins had been remitted by the holy saint of the desert.

During the first day of the journey the caravan traversed a fertile country; here the doura raised its vigorous head crowned with a wealth of green and gold; at its feet the wild pistachio carpeted the ground with dark green foliage and bunches of delicate purple, further on extended blue fields of flax; anon, appeared a luxuriant growth of palmetto, spreading out fan-shaped leaves; cucumbers and golden melons in bounteous profusion bordered the small tributaries of the river, but on the second day, as the caravan entered the vast plains of Elbakara, the face of nature lost its smiling aspect, only the gum-producing acacia, the senna and scorpion-wood, with some sickly-looking verdure seeking shelter in the fissures of the rocks, broke the monotony of the glittering yellow sand. Gazelles, ostriches, and occasionally a tiger, bounded across the plain, giving some animation to the otherwise absolute lifelessness of those desert realms.

Vainly the pilgrims sought some spring to quench their burning thirst; it was not until they reached

the foot of Mount Kaliel that they discovered the only source on the vast plain where man and beast might find refreshment and shelter. A few sycamores surrounded the spring, and among the rocks and caves hard by, were traces of the habitation of men who in the enthusiasm of the first eras of Christianity had come to worship God after their own convictions in the solitude of this desolate spot.

The princess looked around her with a half-weary, half-wistful sigh.

"Ah me!" she said to herself, "happy were those who once dwelt in these wilds; nothing came here to interfere with the peaceful serenity of their lives, no worldly thoughts to distract, no temptations to seduce them from the worship of the Creator. But for the pride which urged me to excel my companions in coming hither to pray at our Saviour's tomb, I should never have left my cloister's peaceful shades — I should never have known the temptations, the weakness which weigh me down with sorrow and remorse!"

After a brief rest the travellers once more set forth upon their way. All day they toiled across the desert plains, a vertical sun darting his fiery rays upon the reflecting sand till the atmosphere glowed with fervent heat, and man and beast breathed with pain and difficulty.

The night brought but slight relief; the breeze which had faintly stirred during the day died out, and was succeeded by an unbroken calm, and the hot sand upon which they rested exhaled its burning heat with uninterrupted fervor.

In the midst of discomforts strong men could scarcely endure, and which to one of her sex and tender age amounted to absolute suffering, no regret occurred to the young princess, no complaint escaped her lips; in the perils she braved, in the pains she bore, she saw only expiation for her sin — the sin of a love which her religion had not been able to overcome, and which the suffering it had caused only served to confirm.

But if she was well pleased with her self-inflicted expiation, Matilda was filled with boundless sympathy for the sufferings of her fellow-pilgrims. As they lay breathless and stupefied upon the burning sands, her kindly heart found strength to offer aid; she bound the bleeding wounds of one, bathed the burning eyes of another, to some she gave words of comfort and encouragement, with others shared the precious drops of water apportioned to her own use.

Two days and two nights more were spent in these fearful wastes ere the weary pilgrims welcomed the distant sound of the surf breaking upon the shores of the sea. Presently they discovered against the horizon a vast stretch of water whose undulations seemed to merge into and commingle with those of the sands of the desert.

At this welcome sight the pilgrims forgot their fatigue; a breeze, wafted from the sea, refreshed their parched throats, they hastened their steps, and gaining the blessed goal, rushed with one accord into the waters.

The princess turning aside sought shelter in the shade of a mass of rock near by, and with her bared and burning feet kissed by the cool ripples of the sea-

waves, sat gazing upon scenes so fraught with interest to the reader of Holy Writ. Further along the shore she perceived the point where in the dim ages of the past Moses and his faithful Israelites crossed in the midst of the divided waters of the Red Sea; towards the south Mount Sinai, where the chief of God's chosen people received the tablets of the Law.

After a long and necessary rest the caravan set forth once more, now threading the shores of the sea; their cool fresh surroundings enhanced from contrast with the arid aspect and burning heat of the desert. The beach was gemmed with innumerable shells; mosses and sea-weed carpeted the wave-washed rocks, and islands of white and scarlet coral rose from the bosom of the sea in pleasing contrast to the cool greenness of its waters.

But Matilda, self-reproachful and depressed, remained as indifferent to the beauties of nature as she had been to the horrors of the desert; to her the present was nothing — the past reminded her only of her weakness, and of the future she asked but atonement and absolution.

The pilgrims passed an entire day in search of the bourn which had brought them hither; vainly taking counsel among themselves, they dispersed in various directions; no sign of the habitation of man, no wandering fellow-creature of whom to ask guidance, rewarded their efforts. Discouraged and weary, they continued their march along the shore. But the princess, with undaunted courage and unflagging steps, had preceded the caravan; her watchful eye perceived at last in the

distance a mass of rock whose base was bathed in the sea, and whose summit was crowned with a glittering arrow that betokened beyond peradventure the presence of man. With beating heart she hastened onward, and ere long beheld the rude cross which marked the hermit's retreat. Faith and hope grew stronger at the sight; full of confidence in the efficacy of the holy anchorite's sage counsels, she fell upon her knees and thanked God that succor had come at last. Her fellow-pilgrims had now rejoined her, and with beaming countenance she showed them the tokens that their arduous journey was now drawing to a close. Then detaching the white badge of her novitiate from her brow, and loosening her long golden hair from its confining fillets, with bared feet, downcast eyes, and hands crossed meekly above her throbbing heart, she advanced with humble bearing and contrite spirit towards the hermit's grotto.

Before reaching it she wandered some time amongst the ruins of a monastery where the hand of the infidel, rather than that of time, had left its fatal imprint. A couple of wild peach-trees interlaced their boughs across a crumbling wall, and a number of broken Corinthian columns, their capitals surmounted by crosses, lay prone upon a red granite pavement. Wending her way amid these relics of a past era, the princess reached a portal of immense altitude through which she discerned the dim twilight of a sanctuary. Suddenly she stayed her eager steps, fearing to trespass within this temple of the Most High.

But the sounds of prayer, so familiar to her pious ear, silenced her fears; it seemed as though the Eternal himself called unto her to bring her weary burthen and lay it at His feet.

By the faint light of the moon glimmering in through the crumbling dome, she entered the sacred precincts and threaded her way along the nearer wall of the church towards the chancel; there she discovered the object of her wearisome journey, kneeling upon the steps of the altar, chanting praises to the Lord in the silence and solitude of the night.

"Oh, holy saint!" she cried, throwing herself upon her knees before him, "revered of men, blessed of God!"

The astonished recluse turned around at the unfamiliar sound of a human voice; during the thirty long years of his retirement in these desert wastes but once before had he welcomed the greeting of a fellow-creature. Rising, he approached the young girl; his wonder increasing as he beheld one so young and beautiful possessed of sufficient courage for a journey whose perils and hardships might well dissuade strong men from the undertaking.

"I have come to you for aid, holy Father," said the princess, still kneeling: "I have braved much for the sake of gathering wise counsels from your long experience, your renowned piety. Do not refuse me, lest, succumbing to the weakness of my sinful heart, I falter in my duty, and transgress beyond forgiveness!"

Her words, her accents of humble entreaty, appealed to the old man's one engrossing sentiment; he raised

the supplicant with gentle kindness. "I will hear you, my daughter," he said, "and rest assured, whatever your faults, that that faith which has sufficed you for so perilous a journey—that faith which is the Christian's guiding-star, will be your salvation. But you have surely not come hither alone, where are your companions?"

"I preceded them," answered the princess, "even now I hear their steps without, among the ruins.

The anchorite advanced to welcome the pilgrims, whom he discerned coming towards him in the clear light of a full, tropical moon. Deeply moved by the sight of his fellow-creatures, after so many years of absolute solitude, he smiled benignly upon them, invoking for them the blessings of the Most High.

"Surely," he said, "you, whom Providence hath sent hither, unite with me in the one true faith? But whence come you? Do you claim nativity in that favored Europe, whose people, whatever their language, whatever their political economy, unite in acknowledging the one true God? Or did you see the light amid those holy places where the infidel reigns supreme, and where the Christian must needs dispute with him ground stained with the blood of his Redeemer?"

"We come, all of us, in the name of the Divine Son of Mary," replied the Duke of Gloucester: "These pilgrims are natives of Syria and of Egypt; these warriors, like myself, have come from the distant shores of Albion to do battle with the Infidel; and this young maiden is Matilda of England, sister of the valiant Richard '*Cœur de Lion.*'"

"Indeed!" cried the hermit, turning to the princess; "so fragile a being with courage so great! Born in the purple of royalty, thou hast preferred the sackcloth of penance! Many men, having drank their fill from the cup of worldly pleasure and glory, have at last turned aside to a holier life; but thou hast renounced all in the bright morning of thy young life—thy sacrifice has been great indeed!"

"Greater than thou thinkest!" thought the young girl, with a sigh.

"But come, royal maiden," continued the hermit; "and you, my brothers, come share with me such fruit as these arid shores produce, come drink of the cool waters of my spring; then after some needful rest, you will give me tidings of the great world from which for years not the faintest echo of passing events has reached me."

As he spoke the old man entered his humble habitation to prepare for the reception of his guests. He first lighted a torch of resinous pine whose clear aromatic flame filled the cavern with light and perfume; and then proceeded to place upon a large smooth stone, which served him as a table, his frugal store of provisions — a cake of meal kneaded with the nutritious oil of sesame, some wild peaches and sun-dried dates, several honey-combs overflowing with their golden syrup, and cocoanuts fresh from their native palms, bearing in their brown cups both nectar and ambrosia. Taking no heed of the morrow's necessities, the hermit cheerfully gave his all, only regretting that he had nothing better with which to welcome his guests.

"For the first time during the thirty years I have inhabited this desert," he said, "I am aware of my poverty."

"Father," replied one of the older warriors, "there is more of the true spirit of hospitality to be found in this humble cell than is now to be met with in the courts of kings or in the palaces of the great."

"The court of France was once renowned for its hospitality and piety," said the hermit, surprised, "have her kings degenerated from the examples of their ancestors?"

"The youthful heir of that vast empire," replied one of the Syrian Christians, "possesses all the brilliant qualities which distinguished his ancestors; but a boundless ambiton and an insatiable thirst for conquest cause his subjects to fear that his reign will not be remarkable for the more peaceful virtues. Philip Augustus is now in Syria, where, uniting his army with that of Richard of England, he is arranging with him plans for the reconquest of the Holy City."

"What do I hear!" exclaimed the cenobite, "the house of Bouillon no longer reigns over Jerusalem — a throne purchased at the price of so much blood and toil is no longer theirs!"

"Two lions from the plains of Mesopotamia," said one of the Englishmen, "have dispossessed that ancient race of their rights, and devoured the substance of the Christians: everything succumbs before the power of Saladin and his brother Malek Adhel."

"What accursed names are those!" interrupted the

hermit. "I had learned of the sudden appearance in Egypt of those two fearful meteors, of their destruction of the house of the Alides, of their cruel treatment of the Christians, one of whom, effecting his escape from slavery and torture, sought refuge in the desert, and discovered this retreat. He informed me of this cruel Saladin, whose ambition caused all the East to tremble; of this still more terrible Malek Adhel, whose marvellous valor already menaced the descendants of the pious Godfrey. Ah, how I commiserated the Christians, foreseeing the day of their trial, and prayed that God might raise up a David unto them! Ere long the fugitive, wearied of my isolated retreat and dreading to risk recapture by leaving it, became a prey to a morbid melancholy, and breathed his last in my arms. After his death, even the faint ripple of life his coming had brought me from the outer world was at an end. I was alone once more with silence and solitude — yet less lonely than before, for a grave remained to remind me of my fellow-creatures. There," he added, pointing towards a broad stone at the entrance of his cell, "rests the only human being these eyes have welcomed for years."

CHAPTER XX.

THE travellers, overcome with fatigue, soon separated to seek rest in rock-sheltered nooks, or among the moss-grown ruins of the monastery; the hermit's humble

couch having been prepared with freshly-strewn leaves and mosses for the accommodation of the Princess of England.

While they slept the hermit went to the beach to gather shell-fish and turtle's eggs wherewith to provide for the wants of his guests on the morrow, his own scant store being quite exhausted by the unexpected demand upon it. For his own sustenance no living thing was ever sacrificed; but now the necessities of his brothers were first to be considered, and he unhesitatingly availed himself of the only means at hand to supply their wants.

Having attended to the sacred demands of hospitality the old man next proceeded to prepare the altar, where, for the first time, the worship of a number of his fellow-beings should ascend with his own to the throne of the Most High.

In anticipation of a privilege so long and so ardently desired, Matilda arose at an early hour and left the cell in which she had rested during the night to seek the hermit. As she reached the rock-bound shore she stood spell-bound by the glorious panorama spread out before her. In the East lay the Arabian sea, mirroring in softened tints the crimsons and purples of the brilliant skies.

Silence still brooded over the earth and upon the face of the waters; the sea-waves whispered softly to themselves of the birth of the new day, and tremulously awaited the coming of the great father of life. Soon he rose in regal pomp and splendor, trailing his

many-hued mantle across the horizon and over the bosom of the trembling sea; upward and onward he came, scattering in his ascent a largess of gold and glittering gems over rock and billow and wave-washed sands, and inspiring all things animate with a new and stronger life.

The young girl contemplated with awe and wonder the magnificent scene before her.

"Ah mighty planet," she said, "that hast looked down from the immensity of thy empire upon the revolving of countless ages, upon the changes of this earth, thou, too, shalt one day pass away from the face of the heavens, thou, too, must bear witness that of all created things, only the soul of man hath everlasting life! And when that day of final reckoning comes, that day when all our sin-stained records are laid before a just God, with what a sense of guilt shall I reveal before the all-seeing Eye this sinful love, which neither the lessons of religion, nor those of suffering, have been able to banish from my weak heart! How shall I confess that all the wonders of this beautiful world are less attractive to me than the love of this Saracen—that my very hopes of winning Heaven are less ardent, since I may not share its joys with Malek Adhel!"

In the stillness of the early morning her bitter sighs reached the ears of the hermit who was now returning from the sanctuary to invite his guests to join him in celebrating the holy mysteries of the Church. He hastened to her side.

"My daughter," he said, "what sorrow is this

which seems to rend your heart? What secret sin can thus trouble your conscience? Can so pure and innocent an exterior conceal a soul stained with crime?"

"Not as men might judge, Father, have I been guilty; but in the sight of God my heart has lost the whiteness it possessed when first I presumed to devote it to His exclusive service. I have sinned, and I have treasured that sin as those of this world treasure life's chief blessing — aye, as God's children value the hope of eternal life! I must speak with you this very day, holy Father; I must lay at your feet my weary burthen; with your assistance only can I hope for reconciliation with an offended God."

"Willingly, my child, will I hear and help you," the old man answered; "but first let us begin the day by uniting in the worship of the Eternal. Humble yourself before Him; offer to Him the sacrifice of a sincere repentance. Make ready by prayer and holy thoughts the sanctuary of your heart for the reception of His divine Spirit."

"Ah, that the power were mine to do so, Father," she answered humbly, as they bent their steps towards the little group of Christians now assembled among the ruins awaiting them; "but one Judas-thought is ever present among its holier brothers, and will not be chidden thence!"

The old man dimly perceived the cause of her trouble, but until he had learnt its full extent would not venture to offer counsel. In silence they pursued their way until they reached the ruins.

"My brothers," the hermit said as they rejoined the Christians, "let us consecrate this memorable day with prayer and praise; come, the altar is ready, the Lord is in His holy temple."

He led the way through the ruins towards the chapel; with reverent step the Christians followed, gazing as they passed upon the scattered and broken columns, the decayed pilasters, the vestiges of by-gone splendor, all attesting the levelling hand of Time.

"And must this grand nave, this stupendous arch, these massive pillars of a sanctuary dedicated to the Most High, become likewise a prey to ruin and decay!" exclaimed the Duke of Gloucester.

In the solemn silence which followed, a fragment of stone, loosened like an over-ripe fruit, fell from an over-hanging arch with a dull sound to the ground, as though to answer him.

"Once," said the recluse, pausing for a moment on the threshold of the chapel, "once this ruined monastery in its fair prime of strength and grandeur looked proudly down upon the sea; once the voices of pious monks, united in hymns of praise, re-echoed through its solemn halls and corridors; once pure and faithful hearts kept swept and garnished, this holy temple dedicated to His service. See, yonder, the cave where Saint John Chinaque, the founder of this sacred pile, retired to bewail the sins of the world, and to intercede for sinners. But the infidels discovered this peaceful retreat, and ruin followed in their tracks; death, more merciful than they, closed the eyes of these faithful servants of the Lord to

the desecration of their holy places. The sacred canticles were heard no more within these walls; the voice of prayer was stilled; silence and decay alone remained to keep watch and ward, until I came. A little while and my voice, too, shall be silenced; a little while and this aged body shall, like these massive columns, crumble into dust, and mingle with the desert sands. But, oh, my brothers," he added, the enthusiasm of an ardent faith lighting up his venerable face, "in that immortal temple not built with hands, we shall meet again! Before His holy altars we here offer up the sacrifice of prayer; but there," his beaming eyes, his clasped hands were lifted heavenward, "there we shall give praise before His mighty throne!"

The pious pilgrims looked upon him in silent awe and reverence: so might have appeared the Israelite Moses, when the weary years of sore travel and anxious responsibility had silvered his flowing locks, and added strength to the fervor of his faith.

For a moment his lips moved as though in silent prayer, then he turned back, entered the chapel, and passed on with reverent step to the altar. The Duke of Gloucester, with the Englishmen, ranged themselves at its right; to the left, the pilgrims prostrated themselves to the very ground; in the midst of these bronzed and hardy men was the Princess of England, distinguished less by her feminine garb than by her meek humility of bearing and her marvellous beauty.

At last her vow was fulfilled: in this temple of the desert, in the presence of this holy saint, she knelt to sue

for forgiveness of the past, for strength to guard against future temptations; and yet, even while she prayed the name of Malek Adhel mingled with her prayers; and when she fain would offer up the sacrifice of thanksgiving, her rebellious thoughts would recall the loving care, the noble self-forgetfulness of the Saracen. With what increase of love and gratitude would her wilful thoughts have flown to him, could they have annihilated space and discovered a secret the desert inclosed, and which the coming hours would reveal!

The religious ceremonies concluded, the cenobite conducted his guests to his cell, where he spread before them the morning repast. While he waited upon them, he questioned them closely about the state and extent of religious fervor in the Christian world. He inquired particularly concerning the Archbishop of Tyre.

"When I retired from the world," he said, "William was yet young; but even then, the superiority of his wisdom, his exalted virtues, and his untiring zeal in the cause of religion, had won for him the second rank in the episcopacy of the East, and foreshadowed for him the patriarchate of Jerusalem. Has he indeed attained that honorable and exalted position?"

"My Father," answered the Duke of Gloucester, "I will not pollute this holy place with recitals of the innumerable scandals which existed at the court of Jerusalem under Christian rule; it was less the valor and ability of the infidels, than the vices of its kings, which caused the downfall of that great dynasty. While it still survived if instead of Heraclius — that monster of

iniquity — they had called the saintly William to the holy see of Jerusalem, his influence would have averted impending ills, and preserved the kingdom to Christian rule. As it was, by the sole force of his sage counsels, he long upheld that tottering throne on the very verge of destruction; and when the excesses of the Christians and the arms of the Infidels had at last brought about the fatal crisis, he alone refused to despair of the final restoration of the true faith to those sacred realms where first it saw the light. He relinquished the high honors and dignity of his rank, and returned to Europe to seek assistance for the suffering cause of Christianity. 'Twas he who preached this great Crusade, the mightiest, the most brilliant that the East ever received into her bosom; his voice has assembled these powerful armies from the far West, and armed them with courage for the reconquest of Judea, and the humiliation of the followers of the Crescent; his voice silenced the discord which divided our leaders, and to his eloquence no less than to the valor of our armies do we owe the recent capture of Ptolemaïs. Each day his zeal attracts new converts to the standard of the Lord; each day his loving charity sustains some faltering sinner . . ."

"Behold in him," cried the hermit with enthusiasm, "the worthy descendant of the holy evangelists, the perfect representative of the saints, the man in whom the Christian world should most glory!"

"Do you think, Father, that your own virtues are forgotten by the world?" said the young princess.

"It must be so, my daughter," said the old man

meekly. "Ah, take heed how you compare the Christian who evades temptations by flight, and him who resisting them, remains in the world to save it: the one, conscious of weakness, thinks only of his own salvation, the other magnanimously risks his own for the sake of his brothers; the former, filled with faith, produces no fruit of good works, receiving all, he gives nothing in return; the latter ever labors without cessation or weariness, never satisfied with the multiplicity of his good deeds nor with the fulness of his faith. On that last day, when all will be summoned to render account to a just God, William's place will assuredly be among His elect, while the humble solitary should be content to obtain the lowliest seat beside the throne of the Most High."

"Pardon my presumption, Father, in daring to answer you," said the young girl; "but if in the person of the Archbishop of Tyre, Christianity offers a noble example of Charity, in yourself she reveals the Christ-like attribute of Humility."

The day was drawing to a close, and while the Christian soldiers and pilgrims retired to seek rest among the ruins of the monastery, the princess reminded the hermit of his promise to hear her confession. He conducted her to a small grotto beside the sea, leaving her for a few moments to silent self-communings. On bended knee she sought to direct her thoughts heavenward; but the world, the beautiful creation of the Almighty Hand, spoke to her with its thousand tongues, proclaiming at once the majesty and

the love of God. Before her lay the placid sea — a mirror without a ripple or blemish, where the stars of heaven looked down, smiling brightly at their own reflection; in the grey distance the skies and the waters seemed to meet and mingle; ever and ever murmured the restless waves rolling inward, breaking over the rocks, retreating, returning, expiring with faint moans but to be endowed with a stronger life; before her the three grand attributes of the supreme Intelligence— the immensity of the sea, the eternity of the tides, the infinity of the stars, all spoke to her of the glory of God.

"My child," said the hermit, rightly construing the sentiments with which she regarded the scene before her, "He who created all this is the same who hath said: 'Verily I say unto you, if men should hold their peace the stones would immediately cry out;' here was expressed His power, but His love is revealed in the words: 'Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' Power and love are God's, my child; so exalted above us in His intelligence, He draws us to Him through His love. If we meditate upon His greatness, our nothingness is before us; upon His power, we are conscious of our weakness; if we reflect upon His justice, we behold our sin; His omnipotence but discloses our dependence; but when we think of His love, my child, we may consider our own; there only may we presume to meet our Heavenly Father: if He judges us, we cannot judge Him; if He commands us, we cannot command Him; but when He loves us, oh, Matilda, we can love Him in re-

turn. Devote, then, your life to this one affection, for God though He be, He can bestow upon you no greater good than His love, and your own is the noblest offering you can make unto Him."

"Alas, my Father," replied the young girl, "I perceive that you have already penetrated the secret recesses of my sinful heart."

"I do indeed divine, my daughter, the cause of your trouble, but its object is still unknown to me."

"And therein lies my chief sin," she said; "to confess the name of him I so err in loving is the most trying expiation I could possibly make for my offence."

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE garb I wear has doubtless already informed you, Father, of the vocation to which I was destined; thrones, rank, human greatness, appeared as nought to me compared with the glorious title of bride of Christ. From my earliest childhood this has been my proudest ambition; in order that I might be deemed more worthy to obtain that exalted position, I desired to join the army of Christians who assumed the cross for the deliverance of the Holy City, that I might worship at the tomb of Christ ere my vows had forever closed the doors of the outer world upon me.

"The pious bride of Richard accompanied me. Doubtless God, to punish or to prove us, withdrew

His protecting arm, for He permitted the Infidels to attack and conquer us — to carry us, captives, to Damietta."

"What, regardless of your exalted rank, they dared to enslave you?"

"I should have been a thousand times less wretched had they loaded me with chains and cast me into their darkest dungeon! But, alas! received in a splendid palace, surrounded with luxury, loaded with honors, treated, in short, like queens of the realm . . ."

"Well, my daughter, why these tears? Continue your story; tell me the name of this generous foe whose rule is so sweet to Christians."

"Oh, my Father, how painful an avowal you require of me! This great and terrible foe, to whom no quality is wanting save the light of the true faith; this proud warrior who has made himself equally feared, admired, and blessed by his enemies; this prince, worthy the affection of even our saintly William, and whose image — forever present in my thoughts, enshrined within my heart — follows me even here, to the presence of God . . . what am I saying? I wander — but no, I have nothing more to tell — you have heard my secret, you know my sin!"

"Humble yourself, my child," replied the hermit, "for your crime is great indeed; but take courage, He who is the Light, the Life, the Strength of the world may, through faith, restore to you the love you have forfeited. But explain yourself; this conqueror of Christians must be a Mussulman; by what miracle of

the Evil One has an Infidel possessed himself of the heart of a Christian maiden ?"

"How can I, holy Father? From the first moment I beheld him a new life seemed to unclose before me; I discovered that a Saracen could be looked upon without horror; gradually I learned that he could possess the most exalted virtues; finally I knew that it was possible to love him. The habits of a holy and retired life, and the presence of the Archbishop of Tyre, withheld me long on the very verge of the abyss; but when that wise and good man had departed, I know not whether it was that a spirit of self-sufficiency and vain-glory possessed me, or whether circumstances impelled me towards temptations I should have shunned, but finding myself frequently in the society of Malek Adhel . . ."

"Malek Adhel, say you!" interrupted the hermit, shuddering, "Malek Adhel — that tiger of the Orient, the destroyer of Christians! Malek Adhel who, times without number, has imbrued his impious hand in the blood of your brothers, and whose formidable sabre has extended the empire of Satan!"

"Each one of these charges, Father, condemns me, since they could not prevent me from loving the object of them! To inform you by what means this sinful love has gained such ascendency over my heart would be impossible; all my surroundings taught me the bitter-sweet lesson; my sister's gratitude for the manifold attentions shown us, the praise lavished upon him by our fellow-captives, above all, the secret admiration.

which I perceived William entertained for him; in this universal homage of praise and affection I found excuse for my weakness; I gathered to my heart with pride and joy every account of the magnanimity of Malek Adhel, I allowed it to receive the impress of his noble countenance, to register his every word, and look, and gesture, to entertain thoughts of his great love for me, until at last he engrossed every moment of my solitude — all other human beings had ceased to exist for me. Nevertheless, my heart often shrank shuddering from its errors; I implored strength from God, but He turned a deaf ear to my pleading. Instead of the wholesome lessons of my missal, I scanned the hitherto unturned pages of life; instead of the sacred nourishment with which God feeds His faithful, I eat only of the fruit of worldly experience steeped in the bitter tears of mortification and sorrow."

"Ah, my child," replied the old man, "affliction is the portion of the disobedient; with Job I ask: 'Who shall contend against God?' But tell me, Matilda, what excuse did you make to yourself for entertaining this sinful affection?"

"I know not, Father; I saw him and I loved him."

"Were you attracted by your lover's beauty?"

"I scarcely perceived it."

"'Were you tempted by thoughts of worldly pleasures and magnificence?"

"They never occurred to me."

"What were your thoughts when he was beside you?"

"I loved."

"But did you not consider that duty — religion opposed this affection?"

"Father, I never ceased to remember it."

"Did you forget that this man was the ally of Satan — the enemy of God?"

"The fearful thought was always present before me."

"And then?"

"I wept, and went on loving."

"My daughter, this guilty flame which absorbs and tortures you is but a feeble reflection of that reserved for sinners who persist in their iniquity. Oh, wretched wanderer from the fold, why would you look upon the joys of this world? Know you not they are but vanity — that, like a vision of the night, they will vanish from your grasp, and you will vainly cry, 'Where are they?' But virtue and self-sacrifice are stable as these massive rocks; lean upon them, they will not fail you!"

"Father, how can I describe to you the frame of mind in which I find myself?— the conflict of so many opposing elements that strive within me?— this mysterious union of all the terrors of hell with the sweetest joys of heaven? I find myself drawn, as by a spell, towards that which inspires me with horror; I perceive an abyss, and I feel impelled to cast myself into it; I suffer more than the pains of death, and I rejoice in my suffering; I have braved all the perils of the desert to implore from you strength to resist the love of the Infidel, and I tremble lest you give it to me; in a word, in

this supreme moment, when the vengeance of Heaven seems to hover above me, when your voice prepares to announce my fearful sentence, this rebellious heart, inspired by love, rises above these salutary fears; and even in this tribunal of penitence, filled with the sole image of Malek Adhel, it can aspire to no greater good . . ."

"Cease, wretched girl!" cried the hermit.

But the maiden no longer heard him. Exhausted by fatigue and fasting, still more by the fearful conflict between love and religion which raged within her, she had fallen senseless to the ground.

The hermit, believing that death was nigh, trembled at the thought of the benighted state in which it would find her. He hastened to the little spring near by and brought water with which he bathed the face of the princess. Presently she breathed again, opened her blue eyes and gazed, bewildered, around her at the bare walls of rock, the broad entrance of the grotto through which the moon poured her silvery beams, the saintly face of the hermit, so full of concern and loving sympathy, bending over her; at the sight of the crucifix upon which she had last gazed ere a sudden night had fallen upon sight and sense, full consciousness returned — consciousness of the present, recollection of the past. She shuddered and, rising, threw back the golden masses of hair which had escaped their coils, as though their weight oppressed her. The old man looked at her white, haggard face, and checked the words of denunciation and warning which hovered upon his lips.

"My child," he said, "behold the light of yonder moon coming in to us from the heavens above, and tracing a shining pathway across this rough and rugged floor; follow its course, Matilda; see, it reaches, it touches this sacred emblem of our redemption; it sheds its lambent glory about the sculptured image of Him who died for us. And now it draws nearer and nearer still. Look, my child, the shining path has already reached us; your weary feet rest amid its rays! Can you read no lesson — no prophecy, from this beautiful vision, Matilda? Will you not follow the shining path of Divine inspiration, even unto the foot of the Cross? The way may be rugged, but thus lighted, it will be sure, and though a thousand perils encompass you, yet will He save and welcome you in the end. Remember the promise He has given to His children: 'All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive...'"

Sudden and unwonted sounds of clashing arms and cries of alarm broke the silence of those peaceful realms, and interrupted the hermit's discourse. He listened attentively: "My God," he cried, "must the wicked profane even these secluded shores!"

"What fearful sounds are those!" cried the terrified princess.

"A horde of murderous Bedouins, I suspect," answered the old man; "they have discovered in the desert traces of your little caravan, and have come to surprise it during the hours of sleep. I go to offer up my life in defence of my brethren. As for you, my

daughter, conceal yourself within the remotest depths of this cavern; do not expose your beauty to the eyes of these brigands of the desert...."

Even while he spoke, a shadow obstructed the moonlight and at the entrance of the grotto they beheld a number of half-naked Arabs, with drawn sabres stained with blood, casting eager glances into the interior of the humble cell. Neither gold nor silver greeted their rapacious search, but they found a still more precious treasure — a young virgin of marvellous beauty. They rushed forward to seize her; the hermit with threatening countenance and flaming eyes, threw himself before her, and holding his crucifix aloft, cried aloud:

"Hold, sons of perdition! I call the Eternal to bear me witness that the first among you whose sacrilegious hand shall touch this maiden, shall be consumed by fire from Heaven!"

For one brief moment the Bedouins, awed by the words, the wrathful grandeur of the old man, hesitated, abashed and irresolute — for one moment only; then, with a wild cry, the foremost among them rudely thrust aside the priest's detaining hand, and rushed upon the defenceless girl.

With the rapidity of the thunderbolt with which the hermit had menaced them, a warrior with fiery eyes and flashing blade, sprang into their midst. His terrible arm dealt destruction to all that came within its broad sweep, and opened to him a path to the princess. He reached her at last; and clasping her in an embrace

that would seem to defy the very hand of death itself, hurried from the cave ere the astonished priest could offer remonstrance or resistance. Recovering from the momentary confusion into which events so unexpected had thrown him, the hermit rushed out in pursuit, but he saw only the routed Bedouins flying hither and thither in the wildest confusion, rending the air with that watch-word of terror:

"Malek Adhel! Malek Adhel!"

The hermit shuddered, and mourned that death had spared this tender lamb.

In the meantime Malek Adhel hurried onward with his precious burthen; neither the moans of the dying nor the horrors of death arrested his flying steps; he thought only of the perils from which for the moment he had rescued the princess; and which might yet return with an accession of strength against which even his strong arm would be powerless to defend her. He soon reached the spot where his fleet-footed barb awaited him; and without relinquishing his burthen, he vaulted upon its back, and followed by a handful of Mussulman soldiers, sped like an arrow towards the desert.

The princess lay like one in a dream, clasped in the sheltering arms of him she loved; fearing to move, to breathe, lest she awaken to the stern reality of danger, suffering, and remorse.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE sun was already high in the heavens when the prince reached the foot of Kolzoum. He halted in order that Matilda might gain a few hours of rest; no mother could have bestowed upon her child a tenderer solicitude; troubled that she should be exposed to the burning heat of the day, Malek Adhel looked anxiously around in search of some jutting rock beneath whose shade he might find shelter for his beloved.

At the summit of a mass of rocks he perceived a group of sycamores and tamarinds; and quitting his horse, with his precious burthen still clasped to his breast, he ascended the mountain, gained the welcome shade, and leaving the princess there, disappeared from view.

Then, only, Matilda, recovering from the stupor which had seemed to envelope her senses since the exciting events of the past few hours, was able to collect her thoughts, and recall the scenes in which she had played so prominent a part. She could not comprehend how Malek Adhel, whom she had believed already nearing the rendezvous appointed by his brother, had so suddenly appeared in the hour of her peril, to rescue and save her. And the venerable hermit—what ideas, what fears had he conceived from the unexpected appearance and daring acts of him who had so recently been the object of her confession and of his denunciation? But

did this peaceful old man yet live? Had he survived the horrors and dangers of the night? And her faithful Englishmen — not one near her — could they, too, and the noble Duke of Gloucester have perished, victims to their devotion to her service?

While she mused the prince returned, with bared and heated brow, bearing his helmet brimful of cool clear water, which he offered to the princess. She gazed at him with mingled surprise, gratitude, and confusion.

"My God," she cried, "how fearful are the events of these short hours! What fate has befallen the venerable anchorite? What has become of my faithful Christians? And my own destiny — what new trials await me?"

"Matilda," said the prince gently, "drink this cool water I pray you; it will refresh and calm you, and I would fain have some serious talk with you presently."

He raised the iron vase to her lips, and she eagerly drank its contents.

"And now," continued Malek Adhel, "while we tarry here until the sea-breeze cools this heated air, I will avail myself of the opportunity and presume to reproach you for your imprudence. Ah, if it were my life only that your act had exposed, I should remain silent!..."

He stopped abruptly; even now he would not pain her with words of censure.

The princess observed his extreme dejection. With downcast eyes, she meekly answered:

"I had anticipated danger from this pilgrimage only to myself: I never dreamed of entailing it upon you.

I believed that no consideration whatever could detain you from the brother who so anxiously awaited your coming."

"You believed this, Matilda?" exclaimed the prince: "I have but feebly expressed my love for you, if you can suppose for a moment, that my heart contains any sentiment more absolute. When, on my return to Cairo, I heard of your absence, and could not doubt your destination, think you my brother, his orders, my glory, my honor even, could weigh in the balance against your safety? No, Matilda, I followed you, paying no heed to the murmurs of the people — of the army; my friends represented to me the anger of the sultan; they reproached me for a weakness that must sully my hitherto untarnished name. I heard them — and I came. I hoped to rejoin you ere you had reached the end of your journey; to bring you back with me before you had encountered the full portion of hardships and dangers allotted to the traveller of these vast deserts; but I lost my way in the trackless wastes, and the delay had almost entailed upon you evils I tremble to contemplate. Ah, Matilda, why did you not yield to my wishes? We should already have reached my brother's camp, and a nation would not now reproach you for my disobedience!"

Once more he checked himself, unwilling to inspire her with the fears which possessed his own mind. He would not acknowledge that his departure had been attended with violence; that his indignant army had endeavored to compel him to march immediately into

Syria at their head; and that he could not even count upon the fidelity of the few devoted men whom he had selected to accompany him, when he exacted their respect for a Christian princess who had gained over their leader's heart an influence so adverse to their cause.

The princess inquired by what means, having lost his way in the desert, he had succeeded in reaching the hermit's abode.

"We finally touched and followed the shores of the Red Sea," he replied, "aware that at some point thereon we should find the ruined monastery. This morning, ere break of day, I heard the peculiar cry of the Bedouins, the precursor of deeds of violence; for the first time in my whole life I trembled with fear — with fear for my well-beloved whom I might be too late to succor. Followed by my faithful soldiers, I hastened in the direction from which proceeded the cries I had heard. They guided me, as I had anticipated, straight to the ruins I sought. When I reached the spot I found that your people had already fallen victims to the Bedouins; the Duke of Gloucester, mortally wounded, saw and recognized me; with difficulty he half raised himself from the ground: 'Save the princess!' he cried, and pointing towards the grotto, where I found you, he fell back a corpse. I left your friends to the care of my men, and flew to your assistance. How fearful the scene that greeted me! Matilda, the idol of my heart, about to become the prey of a horde of barbarians! If I had come too late — if one of those brigands had dared to touch you with his sacri-

legious hand! — Princess, I avenged you; not one lives who regarded you with profaning eye."

"Oh, faithful friend of my brother! Noble Duke of Gloucester!" cried the princess weeping: "'tis I who have been the cause of his death! — And have all my people fallen with him? I do not see one here."

"I left the greater number of my men with them, to assist in burying the dead and caring for the wounded," answered the prince; "I would have remained in person, but my first duty was to you."

The princess reproached herself with tears, that having instigated this fatal pilgrimage she had, though involuntarily, deserted her friends in their distress.

"Your presence would have availed them nothing, Matilda," said the prince. "Do not grieve over past disaster, prepare yourself rather for dangers which still threaten you. I hear the south wind rising — I see in the horizon towards the south, crimson clouds and vast columns of sand, precursors of the terrible simoom. I shudder, I tremble, Matilda: until I knew you, I had never learned to fear!"

Hoping to escape the hurricane by directing their course towards the north, Malek Adhel, accompanied by Matilda, hastily rejoined his party. He found the men terror-stricken at the sight of the unmistakable signs around them; the horses, still more frightened, with panting breath and distended nostrils, refused to move. The prince, convinced that further delay would be fatal, resolved to set forth with his camels only; but the men, unwilling to continue on foot the ar-

duous march across the desert, opposed this plan, and proposed rather to seek refuge on the summit of Mount Kolzoum. But Malek Adhel, whose party consisted of only some twenty men, aware that these mountain fastnesses were mere lairs for wild beasts and more cruel brigands, would not consent to expose the princess to worse dangers than those of the desert; and taking small account of the expostulations of his men, he gave the order to march.

Unwilling to avail himself of comfort denied to them, and anxious to teach them by his own example, lessons of courage and endurance, the prince set forth on foot, walking beside the camel which bore Matilda; while his men followed in gloomy, anxious silence, guarding in their midst the remaining camels, loaded with skins of water, provisions, and a tent.

The day passed without accident; night approached; for the present no danger was to be apprehended. But the travellers had just entered the most perilous district in that vast sea of sand; if on the morrow the simoom should again arise there would be but faint chance of escape. The men, seeing safety only in flight, were anxious to continue the march through the night: their chief acknowledged the force of their reasoning, but Matilda was now exhausted and totally unable to proceed. As he looked at her, lying pale and motionless upon her camel, the demands of a probable exigency gave way to those of the present. Notwithstanding the murmurs of his men, he ordered them to halt; the tent was raised, and spreading his cloak

upon the sand within its shelter, he besought the princess to endeavor to gain a little rest and sleep.

The soldiers, thus compelled to tarry, threw themselves upon the ground and were soon oblivious alike of fatigue and danger. The prince alone kept watch, guarding with sleepless eye and untiring step the tent which inclosed his treasure.

All around him was calm and peaceful; the moon shed her lambent beams upon a bare and arid soil, where the fresh zephyrs of the night found not a spray of vegetation wherein to disport; not a tree or shrub among whose foliage they might awaken the faintest rustle, and break a silence as supreme as the stillness of death.

But presently from the distance came, ever and anon, the fierce cries of the tiger, the sad shrill notes of the ostrich, seeming to herald the approach of disaster.

The princess' sleep meanwhile was light and broken by troubled dreams. The perils which haunted her thoughts, waking and dreaming, were not those which caused her lover such anxiety; others, the more alarming for their intangibility, robbed her of a rest of which she stood so much in need. Love stood sentinel beside her, and upon the honor of a Mussulman her own depended, since she no longer dared hope for the protection of an offended God.

Anxious and agitated, she arose, and parting the canvas of her tent looked out. In the clear moonlight she saw the sleeping soldiers scattered around upon the sand; one alone stood sentinel; his face was turned

from her, but it needed not the triple plumes surmounting his helmet to assure her of the presence of Malek Adhel.

She dropped the canvas with a certain vague sense of uneasiness which solitude did not remove, and summoning her courage she once more looked out. He still remained motionless but watchful as she had seen him first; there was something in the firm self-reliance, the quiet dignity of the prince's bearing as he stood there, unseen, as he believed, by mortal eye, which impressed the young girl with a sense of trust and security. She accused herself for having doubted an honor so often proved; and as she thought of the insuperable barrier religion had raised between them, an involuntary sigh escaped her lips.

Her lover's vigilant ear caught the faint sound. He turned quickly, perceived Matilda, and in an instant was at her side.

"My beloved," he said tenderly, "is it anxiety which so troubles your rest?"

"I have felt troubled, but it is over now," she answered.

Malek Adhel, misunderstanding her, could not share her sense of security. He considered only the dangers of the desert which threatened her he loved.

"Alas," he said, "if I could be assured of your safety, I would willingly lay down my life! To love you with a love beyond expression, and to feel the constant dread that all the strength and courage of my manhood may prove powerless to defend you, is torture

indeed! But why speak of this to you who, so thoughtful of others, are so pitiless towards me!"

The princess raised her eyes to heaven.

"Oh, my God," she exclaimed, "did I but merit his reproach, I should be less guilty in Thy sight!"

"Then if your heart is not so hardened against me, as would seem, my beloved," he rejoined, with kindling eyes, "crown my life with the highest honor, the sweetest boon to which it aspires. Tell me that you love me!"

"Prince," said the young girl, with modest dignity, "this is the hour for courage, not for weakness; for solemn thoughts, not for those of a profitless love: death broods above us; life — so short at best for the earnest duties that belong to it — may be ours but for an hour, a moment more. Let us no longer remain inactive, indulging in fruitless conversation, but rather avail ourselves of such opportunities as we possess to escape the dangers which threaten us; the night is cool, the moon will light us on our way; arouse your soldiers and let us continue our journey."

"You have slept so little, Matilda, you have had no time to recruit your strength."

"I shall gain none here!" she answered sorrowfully.

The prince interpreted her meaning, and would have taken advantage of the implied weakness to further urge his suit, but the princess rose and resolutely quitted her tent; the soldiers, aroused from their slumbers, engaged in active preparations for departure, and ere many minutes the little caravan once more set forth on its weary march.

But in the morning, with the first rays of the sun, they perceived in the distance great columns of sand, now rushing forward with marvellous velocity, now advancing in slow majesty; as the sun rose in the heavens, his penetrating beams gave them the appearance of columns of fire, and the pervading redness of the air seemed to betoken the approach of the dreadful south wind.

At the sight of these ominous presages, the men showed unmistakable signs of mutiny. One of the soldiers proposed casting away the tent and a portion of the provisions, that their flight might be retarded as little as possible. Wrought upon by terror and fanaticism the troop, as one man, declared that their misfortunes had been sent upon them as a punishment for the attentions they had been forced to bestow upon a Christian; and that, should they permit her to remain with them, Mahomet would assuredly entomb them in these desert sands.

At these insolent words Malek Adhel was transported with passionate anger. He drew his sabre, and gazing at his men with flashing eyes: "I swear," he said, "to strike down the first one of you who dares give utterance to a single word against the sacred person of the Princess of England!"

"May I never more behold our holy Mecca," cried one of the mutineers, "if ever I heard before of a Mussulman who held as sacred the worshippers of Christ Crucified, who have left their own country to overrun ours!"

"Wretch," interrupted the indignant prince, felling him to the ground and swinging aloft his sabre, "your life shall answer for your insolence!"

"Great God!" cried the frightened girl; "what would you do! As you value my peace here and hereafter, do not make me the cause of bloodshed!"

The loved voice fell like a spell upon Malek Adhel, quelling his mad fury.

"Get up, vile slave," he said, "and thank the princess for your worthless life; no one on earth save she could have gained it for you. But take heed how you forfeit it again," he added threateningly, "for by the head of our prophet, I shall not pardon you a second time!"

Intimidated by the prompt action and determined manner of their chief, the soldiers were silent, but they were not reassured. It was less the fear of death than the spirit of superstitious fanaticism which disheartened these hardened veterans of a hundred battles, and rendered obedience so difficult.

The following day towards noon when the sun, encompassed by a zone of purplish red, darted down his burning vertical rays upon the hot sand, the camel upon which the princess was mounted wounded its foot on one of the sharp rocks which abound in the desert, and in a few moments was so disabled as to be unfit for further use. The prince ordered another animal to be prepared; but now the superstitious fears of the soldiers broke forth anew, and they openly refused obedience to his commands. This accident to the camel which bore the Christian maiden, appeared to them a direct

manifestation of the Divine Will; they could not, they protested, disregard it without impiety; and in order to regain the protection of the prophet, she who had been the cause of their prince's dereliction from duty, and of their own hardships and perils, must be sacrificed. The boldest among them advanced to lay hands upon the English Princess; but the impetuous Malek Adhel, perceiving their designs, sprang forward; with one rapid movement he caught her to his breast, and clasping her close, prepared his disengaged arm to defend her. With one stroke of his sabre the head of the foremost of the mutineers flew from his shoulders.

At this sight the fury of the others passed all bounds; with fearful cries and imprecations they rushed upon the prince to surround him and grasp their victim.

The imminent peril of his beloved taught the rash courage of the young warrior discretion. Had he been alone, these twenty armed men arrayed against him would only have afforded an additional incentive to valorous deeds; but upon his life depended Matilda's, and for the first time he considered the possibility of defeat, and thought of the fearful consequences to which his death would consign the object of his love. Deciding in an instant upon his plan of action, he stepped backward and directed his poniard against Matilda's breast.

"If this maiden must be sacrificed," he cried, "I alone will strike the blow; but on withdrawing this blade from her heart, it shall be plunged into my own, and I will die calling down the vengeance of the prophet

upon your guilty heads. Think not, wretches, that your prince's blood will remain unavenged; Saladin will follow you to the uttermost corners of the earth, demanding of you his brother, his companion-in-arms; and at the day of final reckoning, Allah and his holy prophet will hold you answerable for this deed!"

His courage, met by their own, had but elicited a responsive flash; but over their superstitious credulity he obtained the ascendency.

"No," they cried, bending low before him in token of reverence, "the person of our prince—the brother of our sultan, is sacred in our eyes; we demand but the sacrifice of this woman, who, with her artful spells and her fatal beauty, detains you from the post of duty. The moment her blood stains this sand, we lay our arms at your feet, and our lives are at your disposal."

"Oh, generous prince," murmured the young girl, "do not lose your precious life in the defence of one so unfortunate; the sacrifice would be of no avail; already death is near—a few moments more, and . . ."

Her white lips refused further utterance, and she fell back powerless and senseless upon his breast.

The rebels drew nearer.

"Prince," they cried with one accord, "let the Christian woman perish! Mount this camel and lead us hence; march with us to the battle-field, where victory or a glorious death awaits us, and we will prove our loyalty to your sacred person, to our country, and to our religion."

"Advance one step further," cried Malek Adhel

furiously, "and my blood, mingled with hers, shall cry out to Heaven for vengeance!"

Once more the men were daunted by the determined resistance of their chief. The blood of their prince would leave an ineffaceable stain upon their souls, and forever close against them the gates of paradise. The most determined of their number proposed to abandon the prince, with his beloved, to their fate; the majority demurred, aware that desertion meant almost certain death to their leader, their prince, the brother of their sultan. But the objection was met by an unanswerable argument on the part of him who had first proposed the measure.

"What have we to do with his fate?" he answered. "If Mahomet pardons, Mahomet will save him; if he perishes, the responsibility is Mahomet's alone."

This specious reasoning decided them. Leaving behind the wounded camel, the tent, three skins of water, and a few dried fruits, they departed, abandoning the prince and the young girl in the immensity of the desert.

When they had disappeared from sight, and only then, the Saracen relinquished his precious burthen; placing Matilda on the ground, he hastened to shelter her from the burning rays of the sun by raising the tent they had abandoned. Notwithstanding his continued efforts and tender cares, it was not till the evening breeze brought some relief from the intense heat that the princess recovered from her death-like swoon. Her first thought was of her lover; her first word:

"Malek Adhel."

"He is here, beside you, Matilda," he answered reassuringly.

She feebly raised her head, and gazed inquiringly about her.

"They have gone, then — gone without you?"

"They have deserted me, Matilda; but they have left me you and my courage. Do not fear, my beloved, all hope is not yet lost; the remainder of my party, with those of your friends who may have survived the massacre of the Bedouins, must be on their way hither. I can depend upon the fidelity of those whom I selected to render assistance to the Christians. Let us remain here until to-morrow, lest in the darkness of the night we stray from the route they must follow. If at break of day they have not arrived, I will carry you in my arms across the desert; the camel, although wounded, will be sufficiently restored to follow us with our scant provisions; and if we can reach Mount Kaliel by nightfall, we shall be saved. My men must necessarily stop there on their way to Cairo, and we can await their arrival. We shall there find an abundance of fresh water, and caves to shelter you from the intense heat."

"Behold, O Heavenly Father!" cried the princess, moved to tears, "he gives me his very life, and yet I am forbidden to love him!"

"Can you believe in so cruel, so unjust a God, Matilda?" replied the Saracen: "No; be assured, if your God is the true God, he looks upon your love without condemnation."

She gave him no reply, but rising, quitted the tent. The firmament sparkled with the light of innumerable stars.

"Why may we not continue our journey?" she said anxiously: "the skies are bright and unclouded, and ere long, the full moon will light us on our way."

"The danger is too great, Matilda, to venture, isolated as we are, upon such a step. The slightest error in my calculations of the distance from Kaliel, would be our ruin. By daylight I shall be able to distinguish the mists rising over the brow of the mountain; perhaps, too, the grey summits of the Pyramids; then I can proceed with confidence. At night, the moon lighting only the objects more immediately around us, discloses nothing of those in the distance, and I should have no point by which to direct my course."

Matilda no longer insisted, but stood gazing despondently over the vast desert waste. All seemed to turn to the advantage of that love against which she had so painfully, so fruitlessly striven. She had braved the perils of the desert to escape it, and it had brought Malek Adhel to her side; she had faced death rather than yield to the dictates of her weak heart, and love had sent him to save or to die with her. Unconsciously her grief took the expression most habitual to her; she fell upon her knees, but instead of prayer, to which her first impulse ever tended, she burst into tears.

Malek Adhel drew near, and took her hand in his own. His love had but increased with the obstacles

which had encompassed it, and as the hope of life—and with it all other affections and aspirations—faded away from his heart; this love, alone remaining, seemed to have taken stronger root, and throve and strengthened in its isolation.

"Matilda," he said tenderly, "listen to me. We are as much alone together here in this vast desert, as tradition tells us were once the newly created mortals who first inhabited this earth. With to-morrow's sun we may pass away from the face of the world; must we go forth, together yet not as one, into the dim regions of the hereafter?"

She felt the tumultuous throbbing of his heart against the hand he clasped; she felt her cheek burn beneath his passionate gaze. She rose and stood before him in the majesty of her saint-like purity.

"Malek Adhel," she said, "I love you. In the tribunal of penitence God has received the confession of my weakness; a confession you would never have gained from me, if the near approach of death did not excuse it. I love you, Malek Adhel, and were you of my faith, the universe could offer me no greater good than your affection; were you a Christian, I would prefer this desert with you, to all the honors with which the kings of the earth might wish to endow me; were you a Christian, I should have desired, I confess, to bind myself to you with vows I contemplated making to God alone; but were you a Christian, Malek Adhel, I should none the less remain faithful to duty and to honor. My life may be short, but it must remain pure;

should I be called upon to yield it up to-morrow, I must return it as stainless as He gave it."

While she spoke her face was irradiated with the love so long unrevealed; but around that love modesty had thrown her mantle ere she granted it the right to appear.

Nevertheless, Malek Adhel in his unreasoning passion saw nothing but her obduracy.

"You love me not," he said, "or you would pity me; you love me not, or you would prefer me before yourself, and should passion be accounted as guilt unto you, you would willingly share it with me. But why believe that a sin which has its foundation in the great attribute of the Christian's faith, self-sacrifice?"

"I believe as God Himself has taught me. Malek Adhel, your influence is very strong over this weak heart; but the voice of Him who died for me calls unto me to resist the pleadings of your love, and I must obey."

She seemed to speak as one divinely inspired; her countenance, her mien, were surrounded with such an atmosphere of purity and majesty, that as the Saracen gazed at her something of awe mingled with his more earthly worship.

"Surely God is very near you," he said; "oh, my beloved, His power surrounds you, arming you against my selfish love. Teach me your faith, Matilda! Show me the true light, that by it I may ascend to you."

"Can it be!" cried the princess, radiant with joy: "God in His infinite goodness has touched your great

soul! Oh, that this may be true, and I may then yield to the impulses of my heart, and glory in a love which was once my weakness and my sin!"

Malek Adhel, kneeling at her feet, vowed eternal fidelity and implored the same pledge from her. She did not answer; but taking her lover's hands in both of her own, she asked:

"Will you become a Christian?"

"Ah," he answered passionately, "why ask it? Are you not supreme mistress of my soul, of my life? I know not what I am — what I may become. I know only that I love you; I have no desire save that of claiming you my very own. Oh, Matilda, give me the precious title I crave — call me husband!"

"I cannot," she answered firmly, "I cannot until you have answered me. Malek Adhel, are you a Christian?"

"Alas," he said, "even to obtain your love, I cannot deceive you. Matilda, I admit that your virtues surprise me; that I seem to behold in you something divine; but I am too little acquainted with the duties of your religion to bind myself to submit to its laws; if they commanded me to betray my brother, to bear arms against my country, I should reject them. But surely that religion which renders you so sublime, would not require such treachery of me! Accept me as I am, my beloved, that, being yours, your God may regard me with favor, and guide me aright."

His words seemed an inspiration to the princess. He had braved death to save her; she would do more,

she would devote her life to the eternal salvation of him she loved.

Kneeling, she besought the Divine sanction upon her purpose. The moonlight fell softly upon the beautiful uplifted face, and presently revealed, as through a glass, the perfect peace which had at last come in answer to her prayer.

Then extending her hand, she laid it in that of Malek Adhel.

"Come!" she said.

He dropped on one knee beside her, and she lifted their hands, thus joined, to Heaven.

"Permit me, O Heavenly Father," she said, "to bring him unto Thee!"

Her influence was upon him like a spell; his volition, his belief, his very identity, seemed merged into her own. Not convinced, but impelled, he pressed her hand, as though consenting to her prayer.

"And now," she said, rising, and regarding him with fearless, tender eyes, "now you are worthy of the name you ask of me. I promise that none save you shall ever call me wife; I swear it in presence of that God whose omnipresence fills the immensity of this desert and overshadows your heart."

She ceased speaking; but Malek Adhel remained silent; happiness beyond expression, happiness beyond the suggestions of his most radiant dreams, had come to him, but with it a sentiment hitherto unknown, which exalted his love and purified it of all earthly dross. Matilda was his — Matilda was his betrothed; but in

calling God to witness their solemn pledge, in invoking His Presence in the solitude of the desert, she had surrounded herself with a majesty before which passion was silenced by respect.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE dawn was already streaking the grey vault of heaven. Malek Adhel, aware that he might never see the close of the new day, yet blessed it, for it had witnessed the pledge of his betrothal. Filled with happiness and courage, he prepared for their departure, trusting that they might be able to reach Mount Kaliel before night.

"My beloved," he said, giving the princess some water and a few dates, "here is all I have to offer you. Our betrothal repast is but meagre."

"'Better is a dinner of herbs, and love therewith,'" she said, smiling serenely upon him. Then, taking from her bosom the sole treasure she possessed — the reliquary the abbess had given her, she passed the thin chain from which it hung around his neck; and while her arms yet encircled him in the act, she touched her pure lips to his brow, thus giving sign and seal to their betrothal.

It was now sufficiently light to admit of their departure. The princess endeavored to walk, but Malek Adhel, fearing her tender feet would be bruised by the

sharp pebbles with which the desert sand was strewn, lifted her in his arms, animated by a new hope, a new incentive to live. Matilda, less confident than he, accepted his support, unwilling to hazard placing fresh obstacles in their way; and leaning her head against her lover's breast, she closed her eyes and soon, overcome by weariness and the excessive heat, fell into a kind of half-dreaming, half-conscious stupor. By degrees her weakness increased; she no longer remembered her surroundings, she no longer saw the threatening whirlwind, the fiery sun; her sufferings, her remorse, her country and kindred, her betrothal, vanished from her memory; she was conscious of nothing save her love and the presence of him whose arms embraced her.

But after the lapse of several hours she became conscious of a gradual faltering in her bearer's step; a vague fear came over her and aroused her from her stupor. She opened her eyes and was terrified at the sight of the pallor which blanched his face; and was still more alarmed when she perceived that he was covered with blood. Snatching herself from his arms — still so unwilling to relinquish her — she cried out in her terror:

"Oh, Malek Adhel — my lover — my betrothed! What has happened? You are ill — dying . . ."

"Be calm, I implore you, Matilda; your alarm is more painful to me than physical suffering. I am well — quite well . . ."

Even while thus protesting, his forehead was damp with cold clammy drops, and from very weakness he

staggered and fell upon his knee. Still he endeavored to reassure her.

"I am well, quite well!" he repeated, with the blood still streaming from his lips.

Heat, fatigue, and excitement, had caused the rupture of a blood-vessel. Matilda, perceiving what had injured him, hopelessly lavished her tender cares upon him, praying God that she should not be permitted to survive her lover. But her grief by diverting his mind from his own suffering, seemed to inspire him with fresh courage — renewed strength.

"My beloved," he said, "I am better, much better now; let us continue our journey. Mount Kaliel cannot be far distant."

"No," she interrupted; "let us rather die here. To die together, Malek Adhel, is not so great a misfortune! If we lived, some adverse fate might come to part us; then with what regret should we remember this day, when death promises to unite us forever."

In these solemn moments, when life seemed ebbing with each pulsation of her loving heart, Matilda gave expression to the feelings so long and resolutely controlled; but the more clearly he discerned them, the sweeter life became to Malek Adhel. With the young girl's assistance he rose and looked anxiously across the desert plain; in the distance he discovered the bare grey summit of Mount Kaliel. He called, he shouted with all the strength he could summon; not even an echo answered from over the vast flat surface.

Discouraged at last, he returned to the princess and

threw himself upon the sand beside her, to await the death he was powerless to avert. Her hand crept into his with a gentle pressure.

"This hour, oh, Malek Adhel, when I may love you without fear and without sin," she said softly, "this hour would be the sweetest of all my life, were I but assured that in the great Hereafter we should not be separated."

The Saracen pressed to his lips the reliquary she had given him.

"Wherever you go, my beloved," he answered, "I will follow. If your God is the true God, may He receive us together; if you err, then with you may I be condemned."

"Forever then!" said the young girl, raising their clasped hands to Heaven.

"Forever!" he answered.

Through the silence of the deepening night, far away towards the east, a faint sound was wafted on the evening breeze. A sudden hope revived the dying prince. He rose, listened; the sound grew more distinct; he scarcely dared to breathe, lest some surer sign should escape him. And now the steady foot-fall of the camel was distinctly heard, and presently the neighing of a horse; then, more blessed than all others to the weary wanderers, the sound of human voices.

"It is an approaching caravan!" exclaimed Malek Adhel, overjoyed; "we are saved!"

"But a few moments more," sighed the princess, "and life would have held in store for us no more fears, no more trials!"

"Think not thus, oh, my betrothed! With life, happiness awaits us."

She shook her head sadly, but was silent.

The caravan had now reached them, and Malek Adhel recognized his warriors. On beholding their prince they were speechless with amazement, and springing from their camels prostrated themselves before him.

"My treacherous soldiers," the prince explained, "after first attempting my life, have abandoned me, with the Princess of England, to the horrors of the desert."

Malek Adhel's trusty followers heard him with sentiments of the deepest indignation, heaping maledictions upon the traitors' heads.

"My friends," said the prince, "to your care I now commit this unfortunate princess; my strength has deserted me — I can do no more. But for your timely arrival, we should never have seen the dawn of another day."

Ere long they had reached Mount Kaliel, and in one of the deserted caves once inhabited by hermits, Matilda found a long-needed rest; while the prince, no longer a prey to anxiety for the safety of his betrothed, also submitted to the demands of overtasked nature, and enjoyed a long, deep sleep.

On the following day the travellers discerned in the

distance the summit of the Pyramids, and presently the high towers of Cairo.

But the nearer they approached the habitation of men, the more Matilda's despondency increased. Remembering the tie which bound her to the prince, she thought also of the obstacles which would arise to separate them; she considered the fatal war now being waged between the empire of the Cross and that of the Crescent, and vainly endeavored to surmise to which side Malek Adhel would attach himself. Would he desert his brother? Would he abandon his own standard to uphold the banner of the Cross? She dared not hope — she dared not even wish it. And yet, should he remain faithful to his country, Richard, she was quite sure, would never consent to bestow her upon the brother, the friend, the defender of Saladin; and Richard's claims to her obedience, as her brother and her king, were sacred in her sight. And thus having escaped the perils of the desert, the newly-found life just opening before her offered no hope to her eager scanning, and seemed scarce worth the accepting.

On his side, Malek Adhel was also troubled. Honor, fraternal affection, imposed upon him duties as urgent as those which religion dictated to Matilda; and he recognized, with a profound sense of humility, that love had more than once rendered him unfaithful to both. Long ere this he should have been at his brother's side, laying the laurels of victory at his feet. But he had forgotten duty and glory; for the sake of his fugitive love, to follow her through the desert, he

had deserted his army when it was on the eve of marching — blinded by passion, he had promised to embrace Christianity. But if a Christian, would Saladin still regard him as his brother? And if faithful to Saladin, would Matilda not scorn him as a traitor to his pledge?

These gloomy anticipations dissipated the bright hopes he had formed when death in the desert wastes had seemed the only obstacle to a peerless happiness. Matilda's profound sadness seemed to confirm the fears, to which neither gave utterance; and they silently entered Cairo without having interchanged one expression of hope in the future, or of joy for their rescue from the perils of the past.

On beholding Malek Adhel, the populace welcomed him with cries and acclamations of joy. The false report of the seditious soldiers who had preceded him by two days had led them to believe that he had been assassinated by the Bedouins.

Immediately upon learning from the warriors accompanying the prince, the treachery of the men who had deceived them with such false tidings, they rushed *en masse* towards the wretches' dwellings, and, ere Malek Adhel could interfere, had given him a bloody proof of their devotion.

Still less — dear as he was to their hearts — could the prince succeed in quelling the murmurs of indignation with which the people greeted the Princess of England. There was not a Mussulman who did not attribute to her influence the fall of Ptolemaïs, and the inaction of the prince.

Malek Adhel, conscious of the justice of their reproaches, was troubled in spirit; never had his heroic soul undergone so terrible a conflict — and while secretly acknowledging his fault, he was filled with alarm lest its consequences should be visited upon its innocent cause. While the princess rested quietly after her arduous journey, Malek Adhel kept watch day and night around her palace; knowing that perils as great as those she had escaped, though of a different form, still lay in wait for her. The superb roof which sheltered her, he knew could not protect her from the blind fury of a fanatical populace; and the blind fury of a fanatical rabble is more difficult to control than the fiery masses of sand which the south wind drives across the desert wastes.

Nevertheless, if love thus kept constant watch, remorse, too, was sleepless in his heart; and its urgent voice joined that of the people — of his army, crying out to him incessantly:

"Malek Adhel, your brother awaits you!"

And still he lingered; fearing to leave Matilda in Cairo, at the mercy of an indignant and unreasoning people; yet dreading for her the fatigues of a second journey — of immediate departure for Syria — and, still more, the reception he must anticipate from the austere brother whose imperative commands he had violated for her sake, in the face of the people, the army, of the whole world.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE day shortly after the return from the desert, a single warrior presented himself at the palace-gates and requested an immediate audience with the prince. He was mounted on a coal-black mare, his armor was green, his visor down, and on his arm he carried a shield representing a field of sinople and a silver zodiac from whose centre an arrow pointed towards the sign of *Virgo*, and around which was inscribed the motto:

"*I seek but her.*"

One of the palace ushers conducted him by the grand marble stairway from the chief entrance to a superbly appointed ante-chamber, where he left him in order to announce his arrival to the prince.

The usher found Malek Adhel with the Princess of England, and delivered the message of the Green Knight.

"What name does he bear? And from whence does he come?" asked the prince impatiently.

"He announced neither, Sire; but from his armor, his bearing, I should judge him to be a Christian; were it possible to believe a Christian would thus venture into the enemy's midst."

Malek Adhel, knowing full well that to many of the Crusaders fear was a thing unknown, ordered his strange visitor to be brought to him immediately.

As the knight of the green armor entered, the prince signed to the slave to withdraw.

"Now," he said, when they were alone, "make yourself known, Sir Knight, the presence of the illustrious Princess of England will doubtless not interfere with the announcement of your errand; and from myself what have you to fear?"

"Everything, were we on the field of battle," the knight courteously answered, "but nought when I throw myself defenceless upon your generosity."

As he spoke he raised his visor and revealed the noble countenance of Montmorency.

His presence seemed to announce to the princess some immediate change in her prospects; and it was less surprise than fear that drew from her a faint cry—that suffused her face with crimson blushes.

Malek Adhel was struck with the same thought, and his anxiety increased on beholding upon Montmorency's shield the device and motto which informed him that Matilda was the sole object of his search in Cairo.

After a moment of silent and intense surprise he addressed him.

"Conqueror of Ptolemaïs," he said, haughtily, "what fatal rashness has brought you within these walls, where your very name would be the warrant for a death from which I should be powerless to save you?"

"Knowing which, Malek Adhel, I have confided my name and my mission to no one. To your honor alone I entrust them. Listen, for the moments are precious."

Then turning towards the princess, Montmorency knelt on one knee before her, and touched the hem of her dress to his lips; begging that she, too, would listen to his story. Blushing, Matilda raised him, and offering him a seat between the prince and herself, prepared to hear him.

"It was not until his arrival in the Crusaders' camp," the young knight began, "that Metchoub discovered the deception which had been practised upon him, and that he had conveyed thither the queen instead of the Princess Matilda. It was too late to rectify his error; and his anger knew no bounds. He upbraided you bitterly, Prince; he accused you of treachery, and declared that you were actuated less by love for the Princess of England, than by a desire to become independent of Saladin; and by forming an alliance with the Christians, to ascend with their assistance the throne of Egypt. This opinion was credited throughout the camp, and great were the rejoicings among the Crusaders. Richard himself believed it, and did not doubt that his sister's hand would be the price you would demand for becoming our ally. Notwithstanding the obvious advantages which must accrue from such a union, he did not regard it with entire satisfaction.

"Lusignan, since he first beheld the Princess Matilda in Cyprus, had become enslaved by her charms; on the death of his wife Sibyl, he declared his aspirations to Richard who, regarding his brother-in-arms as his dearest friend, swore that if ever his sister renounced her

monastic vows, and consented to wed, none other than he should claim her for his bride...."

"Rash promise," interrupted the impetuous prince: "he shall fulfil it no better than the one he made to restore to him the crown he has lost! The throne of Jerusalem and the heart of Matilda are alike beyond Richard's control!"

At these bold words the princess blushed deeply. Montmorency seemed surprised, and after a moment's pause continued:

"Philip Augustus and the rest of the Crusader kings unanimously condemned Richard's obstinate prejudice in favor of Lusignan. They declared that far from refusing you the hand of the Princess of England, it should be offered to you with the conditions that you should forever after maintain our cause and accept our faith. Several of the knights appealed against these projects, declaring that no one possessed the right to dispose of the princess' hand, and that she alone should be the arbiter of her fate. I not only coincided with their opinion, but offered, at the head of a certain number of knights, to seek the princess, however obscure the spot where you had concealed her, to obtain from her own lips her preference, and to shed the last drop of my blood in executing her will. A thousand warriors asked the privilege of accompanying me; a thousand more, nay, the entire army would have accepted the challenge had not the general welfare opposed it. Philip Augustus proposed that I should be appointed to the command of this noble band; and

Richard decorated us with the title of 'Knights of the Virgin.' He charged me, Sire, to accept whatever price you should demand as his sister's ransom, and, influenced by the wishes of the confederate princes he added, that should you in truth desire to adopt the Christian faith, and join our cause, he would ask the pope to cancel the vows he had made to bestow his sister upon Lusignan. And I, Madam," he continued, turning to Matilda, "I took advantage of this opportunity to come hither, with the more satisfaction that it allows me to assure you that neither my thousand warriors nor myself will suffer your personal feelings to be held in subjection to political interests. Acquaint us, then, with your will, Princess of England, and whether you elect to retire among the holy nuns of Mount Carmel, or to rejoin your royal brother, a thousand swords will flash from their scabbards to do your behest."

"Doubtless your troops are stationed near by?" said Malek Adhel, "surely you would not have ventured to bring them into the city."

"I am here alone," replied Josselyn. "My brave warriors are invisible to their foes, and will appear only in case you refuse to liberate the princess, then — beware!"

"If you rely solely upon your own valor to take the princess from this palace," retorted Malek Adhel, "you presume too much. I have a large army here, who will defend her at my bidding."

"Double it if you choose," cried Montmorency, "I fear it not! In the meantime I await answers to my

questions. Will you, Prince, embrace Christianity? And you, Madam, do you desire your liberty?"

In the presence of one brave man, another cannot betray weakness. Near Montmorency, Malek Adhel was conscious of a newer, more exalted sense of honor. He no longer hesitated.

"No," he said, "I cannot become a Christian. I cannot betray my brother. Honor forbids it! But you, Matilda, do you desire your freedom?"

"Ah, Malek Adhel," she said sadly, "does not your refusal to become a Christian condemn me to leave you?"

The ingenuousness of her reply struck Montmorency with a presentiment of misfortune. He continued, in a voice which had in its tones a ring of ineffable sadness:

"Surely it cannot be that your highness regrets the home of the infidel! Ah, Madam, if you knew with what fond hopes your people await you! Each day prayers are offered up in your behalf; your absence obscures the glory which the king, your brother, gains from his numerous victories, and the queen's happiness in being reunited to her husband is still imperfect; there is not a sovereign who is not anxious to lay his crown at your feet, not a knight," he added with emotion, "who does not mourn that he has none to offer you!"

"Montmorency," Malek Adhel hastily interrupted, "perhaps the princess is no longer at liberty to accept them."

An exclamation of surprise escaped Josselyn, and

Matilda turned away to hide her blushes. But in the short pause that ensued a strange noise was heard from within the adjoining apartment; some one seemed approaching. Alarmed for Montmorency, Malek Adhel hurried forward to meet the intruders, and as he reached the door he was greeted by a young Arab, named Kaled, one of his most faithful servants, and the bravest officer of Saladin's army.

Astonished, he inquired his reason for having quitted the sultan's camp.

With sorrowful mien, the Arab replied that he must request a private interview.

Malek Adhel hesitated. He feared lest some curious eye, while he was alone with Kaled, should penetrate Montmorency's secret, and spread abroad the news that the conqueror of Ptolemaïs was in Cairo.

Kaled drew near and whispered in his ear:

"Malek Adhel, be on your guard; believe me, you have not a moment to lose. Everything around you is in a state of excitement. In crossing the city to come hither, I heard it whispered about that a Christian knight was in your palace. I heard the throng mutter the names of Lusignan, Richard, and Montmorency; all three, as you are aware, are equally proscribed by your brother's edict, and the hatred of the people. At any moment an infuriated populace may come, may force your guard and break your doors. Nevertheless, their fury is the least of the dangers which threaten you. Prince," he added still lower, "your brother has already pronounced your doom!"

"Of all your tidings," replied Malek Adhel, "this most surprises, but does not most alarm me. My brother shall one day know me better. But come, Kaled," he added, signing to the Arab to follow him, "there are those here as much interested as I in hearing your advices."

He closed the door against all possible intruders. "And now, my friend," he said, "you may speak without fear before the Princess of England and this brave and loyal knight."

At the name of friend, bestowed by the prince upon the young Arab, Josselyn raised the visor of his helmet.

"I have nothing to apprehend," he said, "from him whom Malek Adhel calls friend."

Touched by his generous confidence, the prince assured him that his trust was not misplaced.

"Here," he exclaimed, striking his breast, "is the shield which would interpose between you and the dastardly weapon which would dare to desecrate the sanctity of my roof. But let us leave idle protestations to those who know not that life has no greater glory than that of losing it for honor's sake. Tell me, Kaled, what has kindled my brother's anger against me to such a point that he desires my death?"

At these words a faint cry escaped the pale lips of the princess. But Kaled with some degree of asperity replied:

"Can you ask me, Malek Adhel? Notwithstanding the imperative orders of the sultan, did you not restore the Queen of England to her husband? Did you not

retain the sister of Richard at your side? And at what time were you guilty of this act of disobedience? At the moment when Saladin had just forgiven you the fall of Ptolemaïs! And now, while he impatiently awaits succor, what are you doing here?"

"Has not the sultan long since received an explanation of the questions you put to me?" cried the prince. "After reading the letters I sent him by a trusty messenger on leaving Damietta, can he still doubt my loyalty?"

"I know not," Kaled answered, "whether Saladin saw your messenger. It is not for me to seek to penetrate his secrets; of this only I can assure you: if your excuses reached him, they have failed to appease his wrath. Some time since, Amaury's daughter presented herself before him, and assured him of your treachery. Saladin refused to listen — to believe her; the suspicions she sought to arouse were silenced by his confidence in your integrity. He required proof ere he would doubt you. But one day Metchoub with gloomy mien and torn garments suddenly appeared before him, and striking his forehead to the earth, he cried out in his rage, and accused you of having deceived him — of having betrayed your sultan. All present shuddered at this terrible charge; and Saladin — how can I express to you his indignation, his despair! For a moment he was overwhelmed with grief — such grief as the loss of his empire itself could never have elicited from him. But soon, thoughts of his kingdom devastated by the Christian hosts, of the ruin

with which they threatened Islamism, reanimated and determined him to strike low the traitor who had presumed to oppose their interests. He listened to Metchoub's account; he learned that, scorning his orders, you had sent away the queen and retained the Princess of England; that with her you had taken your departure for Cairo, with the intention of crowning her Queen of Egypt; and that the Christians were prepared to sustain you in your new empire. Then your brother's anger knew no bounds. The more difficult he had found it to believe in your guilt, the less excusable he considered you when the charge was proved. That very evening he assembled the council of emirs. I was admitted, and this is what I heard from your brother's own lips: 'I have loved Malek Adhel too well. I preferred him to my subjects, as I would have preferred him to my children. The prophet has punished me. The traitor, submitting to the influence of a woman, of a Christian, deserts his faith, betrays his country, tarnishes his honor, and disgraces his brother's name. A single one of these crimes deserves death; what then shall be the sentence of him who has committed all of them?'

"The emirs, in consternation, maintained a profound silence.

"'You dare not pronounce it,' cried Saladin; 'you search your thoughts in vain to find some penalty worthy of his guilt. Death would be the punishment awarded a slave; but Malek Adhel does not fear death; I shall know how to deal still more rigorously with him.

Metchoub, depart immediately for Cairo. Take with you twelve thousand men; with their assistance reduce to submission those of my subjects who may have participated in this rebellion; then seize the traitor himself, if you succeed in overcoming his indomitable courage. Spare no means in order to succeed; everything is excusable in dealing with a traitor. Conduct him, loaded with chains, to the grand plaza of Cairo, and before delivering him to death, surrender, before his eyes, the Princess of England to the passions of the vile rabble . . .'"

"Cease, Kaled, cease; surely you blaspheme," cried Malek Adhel, with a fierce glitter in his eyes: "Saladin's brain never gave birth to so damnable a conception!"

"Since the sultan has beheld in his brother a traitor he is no longer himself; gloomy, morose, preoccupied, he empties the vials of his suspicions upon all who come in contact with him, and has ceased to believe in virtue, in ceasing to believe in your own. The last order Metchoub received from him was, not to dare to appear in his presence again unless he carried your head in his hand."

"Oh, Saladin," cried the prince, "how unhappy you must be, to have become so cruel! But tell me, Kaled, do you know whether Metchoub's army is approaching Cairo?"

"He has marched hither with such despatch that I have anticipated his arrival by only two days," answered the Arab. "On hearing the sultan's orders I forgot your fault; I thought only of your peril, and I resolved

to give you timely warning of it, or to share it with you. On leaving the council of the emirs I mounted my favorite mare, whose speed outstrips the wind, and in less than two days I had reached Mount Thor; yet from its summit I discovered, on the distant plains that surround Ramla, the army of Metchoub making rapid progress in this direction. I redoubled my speed; my courser scarce left the imprint of his hoofs upon the sand; yet so vindictive is the hatred which Metchoub entertains toward you, that I should not marvel if he followed close on my track, and to-morrow's sunrise should find him encamped on the banks of the Nile. Take precautions then, Malek Adhel, for you perceive that the sultan's orders are irrevocable."

"Malek Adhel," cried Montmorency, "accept our alliance. Free yourself from the tyranny of your cruel brother. I will seek my warriors and bring them here; they will defend you from this unwarrantable attack, they will save the princess from the indescribable horrors apportioned to her. A thousand Christians to strengthen your dauntless arm will suffice to put to flight Metchoub's entire army."

"Noble Montmorency," answered the Saracen prince, grasping his hand with a cordial pressure, "I thank you, but I cannot accept your proposition. Never shall it be said that Malek Adhel, to his eternal disgrace, led a Christian army against Mussulmans. My brother's accusation is of small moment; to deserve it would be something infinitely worse. Nevertheless, I will avail myself of your offer for her"—designating

the weeping princess—"for her who cannot remain in Cairo without a risk I shudder to contemplate; for her from whom I must summon courage to part, perhaps forever."

"Oh, Malek Adhel, what have you said!" exclaimed the princess, oblivious of all save this one supreme misfortune. "Better, far, that we had welcomed death together in the desert!"

She had scarcely spoken, when burning blushes suffused her countenance, and tears of shame mingled with those of her sorrow.

Malek Adhel turned away to avoid seeing a grief which unnerved him. Love was once more gaining the ascendency; but Montmorency's presence condemned the weakness.

Meanwhile the Crusader, his worst fears confirmed by the agitation of the princess, buried his face in his hands and furtively brushed away a few tears that all his manly shame could not repress.

Matilda inaccessible to earthly love, had seemed to him like some celestial being to whom the worship of an ardent but passionless loyalty should be rendered; but Matilda sensible to the tenderer emotions of humanity, awakened him to a full sense of a happiness beyond all fathoming—of a love that was now hopeless. Under his very eyes a Mussulman rejoiced in a prize to which he, a Christian knight, had never yet dared to aspire; but such delicacy and respect mingled with his love for her, that he only dared to grieve without thought of blame.

Meanwhile Malek Adhel, silent and preoccupied, was seeking in his own mind some plan by which he could save Matilda without sending her from him. If it had been only his own life he hazarded in retaining her at his side, neither Montmorency nor his thousand warriors, nor Metchoub with his twelve thousand men, not even Saladin himself with all the forces at his command, could have induced him to yield her up. But these soldiers, this people, so ready to shed their blood in his defence, were ready also to rebel against him, should he require their aid in behalf of his Christian love, and would be but too well pleased to deliver her into the hands of Metchoub. Fanaticism, in all its unbridled fury, had pronounced sentence against her; and the unfortunate prince, whose authority in Egypt was second only to that of the sultan himself, was powerless to command the respect of his people for the woman he loved. At the thought, he no longer hesitated. Taking her hand he placed it in Montmorency's.

"Conduct her to the Crusaders' camp, Montmorency," he said, with an emotion he could scarcely control. "To your loyalty, your courage, your honor, I entrust the betrothed bride of Malek Adhel."

Josselyn recoiled in amazement. His fears had not gone as far as this.

"What!" he cried, "the sister of Richard, a Christian princess, the future bride of Christ, is the betrothed of an . . ."

He stopped, suddenly conscious of the discourtesy of his words.

The maiden rose, and turning towards Montmorency a countenance in which he perceived an infinite sorrow mingling with the modesty of her nature and the dignity of her exalted rank, she said:

"Knight of Montmorency, I am not betrothed to Malek Adhel, for Malek Adhel is not a Christian, and only a Christian shall obtain my hand. But I have vowed to the prince, and I here renew my vow, to be the bride of no other man. Should he persist in his errors, I shall return to my convent, and God alone shall replace him in my heart; if Heaven enlightens him, if he embraces Christianity ..."

"Saladin's brother can never do this!" interposed Kaled warmly. "What, not a word of denial, Prince? The very thought insults your honor."

"Listen, Kaled," replied Malek Adhel; "more than once you have witnessed the ardor with which I have defended the empire of Islamism against that of Christ; you know, too, that my piety has not been unnoted among the Mussulmans. But I had not then learnt that a virgin of sixteen could rise above temptation; could resist even the instincts of her own heart; and, timid in all else, could fear death less than shame. I did not then know," he added, turning toward Josselyn, "that mortal man, filled with a deep but hopeless passion, had strength to enchain his impulses, silence his disappointment, and become the defender of his rival. These virtues are characteristic of the Christian religion; the laws of Mahomet do not exact them. I confess they have impressed me more forcibly than

the most subtle arguments of their priests could have done. But, though shaken in my belief, I am not converted; and never shall I adopt a faith whose first command would be that I should become disloyal to my brother and to my country. My first oath was one of fealty to Saladin; my latest breath shall acknowledge him as my sovereign; he may demand my life, but he cannot prevent me from devoting it to him unto the last. The light of Mahometanism now sheds within my soul only a pale and flickering flame; that of Christ does not yet shine; but honor still remains, let that alone be my religion and my law. I admire the Christians, and I will do battle with them; I love Matilda, and I part from her; if I can obtain her hand only at the price of treason, I will renounce it. Tell me, brave Montmorency, if you beheld me raise my cimeter against my country, if you saw me stained with my brother's blood, would you still tender me your knightly hand in token of your respect? You turn your candid eyes from my questioning, Matilda; you give me no answer, Montmorency; Christians though you are, you cannot assure me that the laws of your religion would sanction such perjury. Oh, Matilda, if I abandoned all my duties to follow you, would you deem me worthy to possess you? If I violated my sacred oaths, would I deserve to receive your own? My beloved, in separating myself from you I part from all save hope; the day will come, do not doubt it, when I may seek and claim you. I shall overcome all obstacles; believe me, nothing shall be impossible to Malek Adhel, save to become a traitor or to

live without you. And now receive my farewell — an hour hence..."

He ceased; words failed him; his voice grew thick and hoarse with suppressed feeling. He turned away once more from the sight of the grief which unnerved him, and in that moment of silence the princess had conceived a doubt whether she possessed the strength to leave him. Malek Adhel perceived her momentary hesitation, and a wild thought possessed him that he should be able to defend her against all the powers of earth. One word from her, and love would have defied reason and fear, and retained her at his side. But strength came in answer to her prayer, and the word was not spoken. She drew her veil more closely about her, and made a sign that she was ready to depart.

Her consent restored Malek Adhel to reason, and made him fully realize the extent of his misfortune.

"It is decided then," he said, and hurriedly left the room to order preparations to be made for her departure.

CHAPTER XXV.

As quickly as possible the prince assembled all the Christians who chanced to be in Cairo. He ordered arms to be given them, and advised them to leave the city separately and unite a short distance beyond, near the ruins of Heliopolis. There he promised to join them with the Princess of England and an unknown knight,

whose name he dared not yet mention even to Christians.

From the rapidity with which he issued his orders, the despatch he enforced in their execution, and the impatience with which he superintended the preparations, one might have supposed him occupied in the furtherance of his own desires; he was urged on by something dearer still — the safety of the woman he loved.

Controlling his emotion with a mighty effort, he returned to the princess.

"All is ready," he said, "your women and your litter await you. You will leave quietly by one of the private gates of the palace. Kaled will attend you. . ."

"Oh, Malek Adhel," she cried, as she rose to depart, "ere I leave you, perhaps forever, will you not tell me what fate awaits you; what means you will employ to avert Saladin's wrath?"

"I know not. But one care engrosses my thoughts, and it is not for myself. Ask me nothing, Matilda; do not even speak to me, my beloved; spare my weakness. For the sake of your precious life — go, ere courage fail me and I recall you. Come, Montmorency, you are in the greatest danger, I will not quit your side; follow me, we will rejoin the princess at the end of the aqueduct near the foot of Mount Mokatham."

At the gate of the palace they found an immense crowd that seemed disposed to arrest their progress. Montmorency had lowered the visor of his helmet;

Malek Adhel doffed his own, and disclosed his noble countenance to view. He signed to the people to move aside, and amazed at his coolness, overawed by the stern majesty of his demeanor, they obeyed, leaving a clear passage in their midst through which the Saracen prince and the Christian knight passed slowly and deliberately on their way.

Malek Adhel had not been without anxiety, fearing for Montmorency; but Montmorency knowing no cause for alarm except for himself, felt no dread.

It was only after they had left the threatening populace behind them, and had reached comparative safety, that Malek Adhel broke the silence they had observed since leaving the palace.

"You have just run the gauntlet of a thousand deaths, Montmorency; and I, closely watching you, have detected no sign of emotion."

The knight replied with a gentle smile:

"Our good Archbishop of Tyre would perhaps qualify your implied praise, Prince, and accuse me of an inclination towards vainglory in the fact."

"Montmorency," exclaimed Malek Adhel vehemently, "I confess to you that if I had perceived your courage fail; nay, if the hand I held had but clasped mine with the faintest pressure of alarm, as we passed through that terrible ordeal, I would not have deemed you worthy of the trust I have reposed in you; I would not have considered Matilda safe with you, for the man who is weak in the presence of death, is far more so under the influence of his passions."

"Malek Adhel," replied the Christian knight proudly: "whatever may be my private feelings, rest assured that in confiding to me the tie that exists between the Princess of England and yourself, you have placed between her and me a barrier that even my hopes would not dare to overstep; should I be so unfortunate as to retain in my heart a hopeless love, it would be so scrupulously concealed that Matilda could never discover it, and I would die without so much as asking her pity."

Malek Adhel touched, rather than rendered jealous by a heroism to which he was conscious he could not attain, was about to reply, when he perceived the princess' litter, and with Montmorency instantly went to meet it.

Together they pursued the route along the banks of the Nile. Near the ruins of Heliopolis they found the Christians who, according to the prince's directions, awaited them there. Then only Malek Adhel disclosed the identity of Montmorency to the Christians. They received him with respect and joy, and placing him at their head, with Malek Adhel and the litter containing the princess on either side of him, they set forth on their march.

Ere long they reached a chain of mountains rising eastward, and after several detours in the midst of torrents and rugged footpaths, they entered a gorge—wild, sombre, and but little known—where they found the thousand warriors who awaited Montmorency.

At the sight of so many men carrying Mussulman arms they believed themselves surprised, and rushed

forward to defend their lives; but Josselyn, advancing from the midst of the band, reassured them.

"Fear not," he said, "I bring hither, it is true, the most formidable support of the empire of the Crescent, but his errand is a friendly one, he comes unattended, reposing in our honor a confidence as generous in him, as to ourselves; he comes to restore to us the most valuable treasure which, after the tomb of Christ, the Mahometan arms have ever taken from us. He brings us the Princess of England."

At these words shouts of rejoicing filled the air, and were caught by the echoes of rocky crag and mountain defile. The knights surrounded the litter, bending their heads with the deepest reverence, and lowering the points of their swords to the ground.

Then Montmorency again addressed them.

"After having first rendered homage to the sister of one of our greatest kings, think you not your second thought should be for her liberator — the hero whose virtues Christianity admires, whose valor it dreads — for the Saracen prince, Malek Adhel?"

This great name caused an emotion among the knights only second to that with which they had greeted the princess, and Malek Adhel would have been profoundly touched by the courtesy and distinction shown him by a chivalric foe, had it been possible for him to be sensible to aught save the pain of separation from his betrothed.

While Kaled described to the Christians the route they must pursue in order to avoid meeting Metchoub's

army, the princess retired to the shade of a huge rock overshadowed by a grove of wild citron. The prince followed her; she endeavored to speak, but her voice was inarticulate, and tears gave the expression to her grief which her lips refused. Malek Adhel caught her to his breast in a passionate embrace.

"Swear to me, Matilda," he said, "that neither the will of your brother the king, the solicitations of the Christians, nor even the commands of the head of your Church, shall induce you to accept any other husband than myself."

"I swear it," she said, raising her tearful face to heaven: "to you — or to God!"

Malek Adhel, looking at her, trembled, and cold drops of agony stood out upon his forehead; a thousand times he had overcome death — and now he could not conquer himself. In vain he invoked the courage which had never yet failed him; he found his heart filled with love alone, and the hero of battles in striving to pronounce a final farewell, gave voice only to sobs.

He turned hastily away.

"Farewell, Matilda," he cried; "were I to remain an instant more, I should stay with you forever!"

He leaped upon his courser. The Christians surrounded him. Informed of his quarrel with Saladin, they implored him to join them, promising him princely honors — the right to sit between Richard and Philip Augustus — and the hand of the Princess of England. With all the eloquence at their command they pleaded with him, his heart answered the magic keynote, and

sounded the sweetest harmony of love and happiness. Matilda, hearing the entreaties of the Christians, seeing him pause, knelt before him; she did not speak, but her tears were more eloquent than words. The prince, beholding her thus, felt that upon him depended a happiness dearer to him than his own; with him it lay, to grant the prayer she asked of God!

Kaled, surprised at his silence, approached, and in tones of indignation, exclaimed:

"Malek Adhel, do you hesitate?"

He started like one suddenly struck by a chilling blast, and shivered from head to foot. Then gathering up the reins, he turned his horse, and without reply sped away with the rapidity of the wind.

After a few moments of respectful silence, Montmorency approached the Princess of England, and requested her commands.

"Let us go," she answered with forced composure, "I have nothing now to detain me here."

With considerate but unobtrusive care the knight conducted her to her litter. She drew its curtains close about her, hiding from all mortal eyes a grief which was sacred to her — the sole bond that now united her to him she loved.

CHAPTER XXVI.

On returning to Cairo Malek Adhel avoided the places most associated with the presence of the Princess

of England. Resolutely he put away grief as a thing belonging to the past, and nerved himself with hope for a coming day; no power on earth, he determined, should prevent him from regaining the happiness which had just escaped him. Events change, but a firm and steadfast will can always turn them to a favorable issue.

This thought strengthened the Saracen prince and enabled him to gain the self-reliance which had well nigh deserted him.

Meanwhile, loyal as he had remained to Saladin, Malek Adhel was possessed of too much self-respect to allow himself to be dragged like a slave to his brother's feet; his haughty spirit could bend, but only of its own accord.

At their leader's word of command, his scattered troops assembled; as if by magic, fortifications were erected, entrenchments thrown up, and in a few hours the city was placed in a state of preparation for a siege. For if the prince was resolved to defend himself against Metchoub, he had none the less decided not to commence the attack.

Never mortal possessed to a greater extent than he the qualities which go to form a military genius. To a superabundance of courage, he joined the most consummate prudence. Though he fought with the ardor of a warrior, he never for an instant forgot his responsibility as a chief, and while his arm guided with unerring aim the lance or flashing cimeter, his active brain grasped his surroundings and directed the movements of his army.

The day following that of the princess' departure, the sentinels posted on the summit of the high towers of Cairo announced to the prince that they perceived in the distance a host of men advancing across the plains amid clouds of dust, their spears and lances glittering in the sun. Malek Adhel assembled his troops and the people in the great square of the city, and thus addressed them:

"Saladin has been deceived; he believes I have rebelled against his authority, considers me a traitor, and sends Metchoub hither to seek my head. Will you deliver it to him?"

A cry of horror, followed by loud hisses, resounded throughout the vast assemblage, and only friendly faces greeted the prince's questioning eyes. With one voice they swore to defend and uphold him. Such unmistakable testimony of the power he held over the hearts of the people, surprised and touched the brother of Saladin; but he could not glory in a power which, while it might attend him in the wildest flights of ambition, even to the throne of Egypt, had denied him the one blessing he craved in life — the possession of the object of his passionate worship.

Malek Adhel was aware that in opposing his own force to the army sent by the sultan, he was raising the standard of rebellion against his authority; but he was irritated by receiving no reply from Saladin to the message he had sent him from Damietta; he felt indignant that one word from himself had not sufficed to refute all the accusations Metchoub might have ad-

vanced against him; and he was resolved not to submit until he had proved to his brother that it was in his power to command.

However, in order to avoid, if possible, shedding Mussulman blood, he sent a herald with offers of peace to Metchoub. Metchoub was astonished upon learning that Malek Adhel, warned of his approach, was already prepared to receive him. He could not comprehend how the tidings had reached him with a celerity surpassing his own rapid march; but he understood only too well, that this circumstance had greatly increased the difficulties attending his mission. Taken at a vantage, Malek Adhel would have made him pay dearly for his defeat; but forewarned, victory would assuredly be his. This unexpected obstacle to the fulfilment of his vengeance redoubled Metchoub's animosity; still he could not well refuse to listen to the propositions of the prince, lest Saladin some day should hold him accountable.

Attended by a number of his officers, he entered Cairo and repaired to Malek Adhel's palace. He bowed low before the brother of his sovereign, and the prince courteously signed him to be seated.

"I am informed," said Malek Adhel, "of the errand with which Saladin has charged you. You will be able to execute neither of his orders; the Princess Matilda is now but a short distance from the camp of her brother, the King of England; and the disposition of my troops is such that, with a word from me, by set of sun your army will have ceased to exist.

Take my advice, Metchoub; return immediately to Syria, and inform my brother of all you have witnessed here; tell him that prudence forbade you to give battle where defeat would have caused you shame and victory regret. Tell him I am not unacquainted with the fact that the Christians, emboldened by their success at Ptolemaïs, are preparing to attack Cæsarea, and that I shall proceed thither immediately. There let Saladin rejoin me; there let him decide whether I merit his suspicions — deserve the disgrace he would have awarded me."

"I know full well, Prince, that if you sustain Cæsarea, Cæsarea will not fall; nevertheless, I cannot appear before the sultan without bringing with me proofs of my obedience, and of your submission to his mandates."

"And what proofs do you require?" demanded Malek Adhel haughtily.

"That you surrender yourself my prisoner, Prince; that you allow yourself to be brought a captive to the feet of Saladin."

"*I* your prisoner!" replied Malek Adhel, smiling bitterly. "You would accomplish with a single word what the Christians with all their armies have failed to do! Ah, Metchoub, that would be too much glory for one like you! It will not be your hand that fetters mine. You have heard my proposition; I have nothing to add. If you reject it, return immediately to your camp, prepare for battle, and we shall see ere nightfall which of us two will be the prisoner."

Offended as he was by the prince's haughty threat, Metchoub was none the less gratified by the opportunity it afforded him to accept the trial of arms. He informed Malek Adhel of his determination, in obedience to the sultan's orders, to enforce respect for the rights and supremacy of the throne, and announced himself as prepared for battle.

Immediately upon the departure of Metchoub, Malek Adhel, whose quick eye and ready wit had already discerned and acted upon the advantages of the situation, disposed his troops in such a manner as to enable him to surround the enemy at the decisive moment.

Scarcely had Metchoub's troops begun to falter when they found themselves completely hemmed in by those of Malek Adhel; then into their midst sprang the brother of Saladin, with drawn sword and raised visor.

"Friends," he shouted, in the loud, clear tones that so often had rallied their flagging courage, or cheered them on to glorious victory, "companions-in-arms, brother Mussulmans: they ask you for my life — will you yield it to them!"

On hearing the voice so dear to their hearts, and beholding the majestic form and noble countenance of which they were so proud, the wildest disorder prevailed throughout the ranks of Metchoub's army. In vain he endeavored to rally his men; they no longer obeyed or even heard him; some cast away their arms, others took flight, the greater number deserted to the standard of their former chief.

Metchoub remained a general only in name, a

leader without an army; and that evening was a prisoner in Cairo, as Malek Adhel had predicted.

After this easy victory Malek Adhel permitted his troops a few hours rest. On the following day, at early sunrise, he summoned them to assemble in the great plaza of the city. Here Metchoub was brought before him, and in the presence of his soldiers and of the people, he thus addressed him:

"Far be it from me, Metchoub, to reproach you for yesterday's acts; rather let me assure you of my sincere approval of your conduct. In obeying your master, you have but fulfilled your duty. I will not longer deprive the sultan of the services of so faithful a subject. Return to him — you are free. Take with you as many of your men as are willing to accompany you; never can Saladin's subjects be prisoners of Malek Adhel. Nevertheless, while I permit them to follow you, you will not oppose those who elect to march with me to Cæsarea. Let the men choose between us."

As the prince ceased speaking, Metchoub looked sullenly about him; in vain, not one man came forward to console him for the desertion of the remainder; not one manifested even the faintest hesitation. Metchoub turned white to the lips. The troops whom he had brought hither to punish a rebel, had become the instruments of that rebel's triumph; and the prince upon whom he expected to wreak deadly vengeance, had granted him a generous pardon. He must return alone by the route where only a few days previous he had led an army to a promised victory.

Malek Adhel, perceiving his chagrin, endeavored to soothe it.

"Do not be cast down, Metchoub," he said kindly; "I perceive in the choice made by your troops, only their courage. I spoke of battle, and they all desired to follow me. If it had been you who had shown them the enemy, they would have marched with you."

These generous words instead of soothing only increased the resentment of the humbled chief, by placing him still more deeply under obligation to his enemy.

He hastened to quit the scene of his humiliation, and took his departure with a small number of his officers who, moved by his abandonment, consented to serve as an escort.

While Metchoub followed the road to Kouroutba, Malek Adhel, worshipped by the men he had just conquered, heard their self-gratulations upon their change of leader, and read in their eager looks assurance of victory; in return for so flattering a confidence, he issued his orders and set forth upon the march towards Cæsarea.

The inhabitants of that city had beheld, not without considerable uneasiness, the preparations for attack in progress among the Christians. Taking warning by the example of Ptolemaïs, they had seen in its fall the precursor of their own fate; and in order to obtain easier terms of capitulation, they had resolved to surrender on the approach of the enemy.

Suddenly an army appeared before Cæsarea. A wild alarm took possession of the city, and tumultuous cries resounded on all sides:

"The Christians are coming! The Christians are at our gates!"

Those in command, yielding to their own fears as well as to the intercessions of the inhabitants, prepared to open the gates to the enemy.

At the moment, however, that the drawbridges were being lowered, the standard of the Crescent appeared, and a cheering rumor was soon afloat that Malek Adhel himself had come to defend the stronghold.

The inhabitants of Cæsarea left the city in crowds to welcome their prince, received him with loud acclamations of joy, strewed his path with flowers, and bowed their faces to the very ground before him. The authorities tendered him the keys of the city, with a joy far greater than that with which they had received them.

His first care was for his men. Ordering them to seek rest and refreshment, he proceeded, thoughtless of his own necessities, to inspect the fortifications of the city, and to inform himself of its means of defence. With indefatigable attention he had soon mastered all the necessary details; then only he consented to retire, under pretext of seeking rest, but really in order to devote himself to that sentiment which, notwithstanding that honor had triumphed over it, was greater than all others in his heart.

He despatched a messenger for Kaled.

"Kaled," he said, "I need a friend who will hazard his life for my sake. I have chosen you."

"All will envy me the flattering preference," an-

swered Kaled, "but none shall deserve it better than I. Speak; I am ready to do your behest."

"This very night you will leave Cæsarea. Go as near as possible to the Crusaders' camp, endeavor even to penetrate within. Ascertain whether the Princess of England has yet arrived. Kaled, I own to you, that until I am assured of her safety, I shall not know one moment's rest. If you could only see her! But I cannot hope for so much; they would not permit it. Nevertheless, should you be surprised, captured, and threatened by the Christians with the doom of a spy, request to be taken before the princess; she will recognize you as my friend, and find means to prevent harm from befalling you."

"I promise you, Prince, that prudence shall not so far direct my course as to prevent me from gaining a word with the lady of your love. Rest assured that I shall not return without having seen her."

Touched by this proof of the young Arab's devotion, Malek Adhel warmly grasped his hand.

"You had already proved yourself worthy of my friendship, Kaled," he said; "you have now earned my gratitude. May I some day be able to repay you."

Kaled bowed with profound respect before the prince.

"You could bestow no greater recompense," he answered, "than these flattering encomiums. May I prove myself worthy of them! The friendship of a man like you, great Prince, raises one above all human weaknesses, and inspires him with an ambition to emulate

qualities he must admire. Malek Adhel, in the name of the proud title you have bestowed upon me, permit me to implore you always to remain true to yourself, the support of an empire over which you might rule. Subject to your brother, leave authority to him, and reign over our hearts with the rule of affection!"

"What suspicion do your words disclose, Kaled?" said the prince sadly; "have I ever envied my brother his power? Has the glory of his high estate tempted me? Has it been for self-aggrandizement I have borne arms? Ah, believe me, far from such unworthy jealousy, I rather mourn my contiguity to the throne; in a more obscure position, I might yield to the impulses of my heart without fear of the reproaches of my sovereign, of my country, of my conscience. When unhappy love vainly implored me to desert my brother, what can you fear from ambition?"

"Forgive the doubt," cried Kaled; "it was more humiliating to him who dared to conceive it, than to him who can never have deserved it. I will prove to you by deeds, not words, how exalted you are above all other men in the eyes of your faithful Kaled. But night comes on apace. I must depart. If we meet no more on earth, we shall be reunited in a better world, and if there you say to me: 'Kaled, I am satisfied with you,' I shall have nothing left to ask of Mahomet."

Malek Adhel, soothed by a promise upon which he felt he could rely, at last sought the repose which, since his parting from Matilda, anxiety had denied

him. Meanwhile confusion reigned in the camp of Saladin.

On his return towards Kouroutba, Metchoub encountered Agnes, who, at the head of a numerous party of Mussulmans, was advancing in the direction of Cairo for the evident purpose of assisting at the defeat of her recreant lover, and of enjoying her rival's humiliation.

On learning that Malek Adhel had successfully resisted Metchoub's forces, and that the Princess of England had escaped, her anger was fearful to witness; but Metchoub, beholding in her an instrument of revenge, suggested the hope that by forced marches she might yet succeed in overtaking Matilda's escort ere it could reach the Crusaders' camp.

Agnes paused to hear no more. On the wings of jealousy and revenge she flew towards Ptolemaïs, followed by the warriors under her command.

Metchoub, rejoicing in this *coup d'état*, continued his way to Kouroutba.

On his arrival he immediately repaired to the sultan, and informed him that his brother had openly raised the standard of rebellion; that he was already master of the whole of Egypt, and that the twelve thousand men dispatched to take him, seduced by bribes and promises, had deserted to his standard.

"Not content with his dominion in Egypt," continued Metchoub, "Malek Adhel is even now advancing upon Cæsarea; there he intends concluding the terms of an alliance with the Christians, and uniting

his forces with their own, will defy those of the empire of the Crescent."

Pale with rage, Saladin had listened to this recital in ominous silence, but when Metchoub had ceased speaking his fury burst forth without restraint. Fearful imprecations escaped his white lips. The soldiers whom he had deemed most devoted to his interests, had betrayed him; had abandoned his cause for that of a vile traitor who had rewarded with the blackest ingratitude the benefits he had showered upon his unworthy head. It was no longer the blood of Christians for which he thirsted, but that which flowed in his own veins. Let him but mete out to his brother a punishment commensurate with his crime, and he would willingly pay the price even to the loss of his empire itself.

Saladin rushed out of his tent, assembled his troops, and went from rank to rank, launching fearful threats upon all who should refuse to join him in holding accursed Malek Adhel and those who had deserted the colors of his envoy.

"Cæsarea! Cæsarea!" he cried, "thou shalt bear witness to my vengeance; it shall be terrible as the crime which calls it forth. Mahomet, thou whose faith Malek Adhel has deserted, teach my arm to strike home! Let all those who have outraged my sovereign power feel the effects of thine indignation! May the might of Allah recall the souls they have disgraced, and surrender their vile carrion to the beasts and birds of prey! May their bodies strew the plains like the leaves of autumn, and our swords be drunk with their blood!

Let my courser wade through a river of gore, that when at last I reach Malek Adhel, I may say to him, ere plunging my poniard in his throat, 'thou who hast known the glory of Saladin's love, learn now how fearfully he can punish.'"

All who heard him were touched by his angry grief; and influenced by reports to which they were unable to deny credence, gave answering tokens of indignation. A thousand sabres flashed in the air, fierce cries resounded from all sides:

"Cæsarea! Cæsarea!"

"Yes; 'tis there we will find the traitor. Be ready to march in an hour."

Leaving his camp sufficiently protected in case of attack, and placing Metchoub in command of the advance guard of the army, Saladin took his own position in the centre, and set forth upon a forced march towards Cæsarea.

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MATILDA

PRINCESS OF ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE sentiment which Matilda had inspired, and which she herself experienced, had taught her innocent heart the various languages in which love expresses itself, and although Montmorency's feeling showed itself only by silence, she could not fail to see it, nor could she forbear admiring the self-control with which he confined his attentions within the limits of the most profound respect. He walked beside her litter, grave and silent; speaking only when she addressed him, and answering even then in terms as concise as respect would permit.

And now they were approaching Palestine. Ascalon and Ramla were already passed; and ere long the hills surrounding Ptolemaïs would appear in view, when suddenly in the distance a considerable detachment of Mussulman soldiers was seen approaching.

Evidently emboldened by a conscious superiority of numbers, the Infidels on perceiving the princess' escort, rushed upon it at full galop.

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Josselyn, thus taken by surprise, hesitated a moment; habit and impulse urged him to meet the enemy half way, but he dared not leave the princess whom it was his peculiar charge to defend.

Until this instant he had never awaited an attack, nor calculated the force of the enemy until they had been conquered. Now he observed, counted, awaited them, and his greatest courage for the moment lay in controlling his impulse to rush forward. The other knights, imitating his example, ranged themselves on the defensive, around Matilda's litter.

The astonished Mussulmans questioned among themselves whether the men upon whom they were advancing, were really Christians. If their arms and accoutrements marked them as Crusaders, their actions certainly belied the fact, for during the long and furious wars waged between these two peoples for the possession of the arid territory of Judea, never before had it been said that the defenders of Christ had paused in the path of the lions of Islamism.

Thus supposing their foe a prey to terror, the Infidels grew bolder, and advanced rapidly upon them; but scarcely had they had time to strike when their first line was broken by the formidable arm of Montmorency; his blows fell fast and sure, dealing death among the Mussulmans. By his marvellous prowess, and his knightly mien, they at last recognized him, and such panic took possession of the Infidels, that only Malek Adhel himself could have succeeded in reassuring them. They broke their ranks and fled in confusion. One

warrior alone remained; he neither sought to attack, nor to defend himself, his ire seemed directed principally towards the litter containing the princess. He finally succeeded in reaching it, and with a quick movement, he poised his javelin and sent it flying through the curtains of the litter.

The point of the weapon grazed Matilda's arm, inflicting a slight flesh wound. As Josselyn, in anxious alarm, hastened to her side, he perceived the blood staining the sleeve of her dress, and white with rage he sprang upon the sacrilegious warrior. At last the Infidel who, without flinching, had defended himself until now against the attack of the Christians surrounding him, showed signs of fear. Taking advantage of the moment when Josselyn paused for one instant to take deadly aim, he pressed his heels to his courser's flanks and sped rapidly away.

But Montmorency, throwing discretion to the winds, followed in hot pursuit. Circling and flying through a thousand devious ways, the Infidel decoyed his pursuer some distance from his party. Finally the knight succeeded in reaching his enemy. He sprang forward, and with a powerful blow sent him reeling to the ground; then, leaping from his horse, he drew his poniard to take his life.

"Strike, Montmorency," cried the fallen warrior hoarsely, "plunge your steel into the breast of a defenseless woman!"

The French knight stayed his arm in the very act of striking; though half-suspecting that the words of his

fallen foe were but a ruse to afford him the opportunity of escape from a merited fate. His courage, his prowess, were certainly those of a man; yet unwilling to act while a doubt existed in his mind, Montmorency with a quick movement severed the straps confining his enemy's helmet, and disclosed to view the delicate features and flowing hair of a woman. Although he perceived the Mussulmans rallying and advancing upon him once more, knightly courtesy forbade Montmorency to depart without having first rendered assistance to the woman whom, ignorant of her sex, he had struck low.

But scarcely had Agnes regained her feet when seizing her lance and shield, she turned upon the knight. Montmorency warded her blows, but refused to return them; scorning the princess who had disgraced her sex, her faith, and her country, he yet respected in her the womanhood his knightly oaths bade him defend.

Meanwhile the Mussulmans had approached.

"Help, followers of Saladin," cried Agnes, "and Montmorency is ours!"

They surrounded Josselyn; then, free from the only enemy she feared, Agnes darted like the wind towards the spot where she had just quitted the chief object of her wrath.

Montmorency perceived her design and trembled for Matilda. But the thought of her danger nerved his arm afresh. He raised his trusty sword and dealt blow after blow on either side, until death and fear had cleared him a free passage through the enemy that en-

compassed him. Then, watching his opportunity, he sped rapidly away in the direction Agnes had taken.

Once more he overtook her. Enraged, the Amazon drew rein and turning upon him dealt him a terrible blow. The knight hesitated. By the overthrow of Agnes he could readily rejoin his party ere the Saracens could reach him; but death was less to be feared than the shame of shedding a woman's blood.

Still parrying her thrusts, he coolly awaited the Mahometans, and only when their attack was renewed did he deign to return blow for blow.

The encounter was a desperate one and, Montmorency knew full well, could not but prove fatal to himself in the end; but the diversion would enable the princess' guard to form again and prepare for the emergency of a second attack. Probably, too, relinquishing all hope of his escape from such overwhelming numbers, they would conclude it the wiser plan, in order to insure the princess' safety, to resume their route with as little delay as possible.

Determined to increase the chances in favor of his people by prolonging the fray as long as possible, and inspired by the thought of thus sacrificing his life for the woman he so hopelessly loved, Montmorency fought with the ardor and courage of the fabled heroes of antiquity. The Mussulmans, to whom deeds of valor were familiar, marvelled at a daring which even their gallant prince, Malek Adhel himself, had never yet equalled; while Agnes' warlike spirit was at last subdued by admiration, and something of a womanly de-

sire to spare so noble a life, caused her blade more than once to err in its course.

But while recognizing qualities most calculated to enlist their sympathies, the Saracens could not submit to the mortification of flying before a single Christian knight. They closed their ranks as quickly as he severed them, and hemmed him closely in. In vain Josselyn surrounded himself with a rampart of dead bodies; as their number increased, those of the living did not seem to lessen.

But presently his sword, his only effective weapon in such close quarters, snapped in the breast of a Mussulman; he drew forth the bloody fragment and, covered with wounds, he dropped from sheer weakness upon his knee, fighting to the last.

In the meantime the Christians, uneasy at the prolonged absence of their chief, scattered over the plains in search of him. At length they discovered the enemy, and with one accord divining that where danger was, there would Montmorency be found, they urged their horses to their fullest speed. The arrogant Agnes endeavored to intercept their approach. They overthrew and passed over her. Surprised at the number of dead and wounded, they glanced around thinking to behold some unexpected accession of Christians, but beheld only Montmorency, on one knee, dealing blows which, if they were fast losing strength, showed no sign of submission to defeat.

The knights rushed to the rescue of their beloved chief. A short but decisive conflict ensued, and the

Saracens, weakened in numbers and overawed by the desperate resistance of the Christians, finally took to flight, carrying Agnes with them.

But succor had come too late. The life-blood poured from Josselyn's wounds, and the shadows of death were already about him. He strove to rise, to speak; in vain; he reeled and fell to the ground, his eyes closed to the light of day. His friends raised in their loving arms the unconscious form of their young hero, and bore him to the spot where a detachment had remained to guard the princess.

They relieved him of the weight of his armor, and perceived with horror that the point of a broken lance still remained in his breast. His esquire examined his wounds, and expressed hopes of his recovery should he succeed in extracting the lance-head. He made several ineffectual attempts. The pain recalled the knight to consciousness. He glanced searchingly around. His companions-in-arms, with mournful countenances and moist eyes, surrounded the stretcher upon which they had laid him. He smiled faintly upon them; but his glance, still unsatisfied, passed beyond, and rested at last upon her for whose sake he was thus laid low.

Her anxious eyes read the wistful look in his — the longing for her presence which his lips, faithful to their promise to respect in her the betrothed of another, refused to utter. She came to him, her face bathed in tears, and laid her hand gently upon his. He carried it to his lips with a fervor so tempered by reverence, that even Malek Adhel could not but have sanctioned the act.

"O noble life, sacrificed for me!" the young girl cried, "my brother—all the Christian world will reproach me for your death!"

"Could they know all, they might rather rejoice for me. Death is sweet when your hand leads me to the very portals; life could possess no charm apart from you. Do I err in speaking thus, Matilda, does not the solemn presence of death sanction the avowal?"

His esquire interrupted him; anxious to withdraw the iron from the wound, in the hope of affording relief. Montmorency bade him desist.

"Wait a moment longer," he said; "my life will probably ebb with the current which must follow the operation, and ere I go hence I have still something to say to the Princess Matilda."

Then lowering his voice, he said to her as the knights retired a few steps beyond hearing:

"Before the throne of Divine mercy, where I shall shortly appear, I will intercede for the conversion of Malek Adhel. This, and your happiness are my last earthly desires. Tell him so, some day when together you shed kindly tears for my fate. I shall not be jealous *there*," he added, a faint, half-mournful smile quivering upon his pale lips.

The princess, kneeling beside him, endeavored to reply; to bless him for his generous words—to assure him of a sister's tender affection, but sobs choked her utterance, and tears alone bore witness to her grief.

Beholding the princess thus overcome, the regrets of the knights burst forth afresh.

"Oh lovely and splendid flower," cried one, "cut down in the morning of thy days, whose glory shall ever equal thine!"

And Josselyn answered with emotion:

"If, my brothers, a little glory has shone upon my few years, if honor has been my law, and religion my guide, if I die faithful to my vows, and to the God of my fathers, my memory will live after me in the hearts of my countrymen and fellow-Christians — in yours, Madam, may I trust?"

"Forever!" cried the princess, pressing his hand to her heart, and lifting her eyes to heaven as though to register there her promise.

"Then I die content," he answered with brightening eyes.

"My friends," he said presently, after a moment's silence, "if you deem my last request not dictated by too much pride, bury me before Ptolemaïs—let my tomb be so placed that the Infidels must pass over it to reach the ramparts of the city. Perhaps they will not dare . . ." he added, with something of the old spirit kindling in his eyes.

"We swear to fulfil your request, Knight of Montmorency," they cried: "by our knightly swords we swear, that should Heaven refuse to spare you longer to us, we will raise your tomb before the city you have conquered, that it may serve as her shield and our reminder of the requirements of chivalry!"

Josselyn smiled in grateful acknowledgment. Then turning to his esquire, he said:

"I am ready now. You wish to withdraw this dart?"

"Aye, noble knight, and may my hand be firm in the attempt."

"Mine will not tremble," said his master: and without hesitation he wrenched the iron from the wound.

The violent effort, added to that he had made in speaking, caused the blood to flow copiously, and with it ebbed what remnant of strength he still possessed. His pale lips murmured a last farewell, his eyes closed forever upon the blessed light, his hands dropped, stiff and motionless, above his pulseless heart.

Montmorency was dead.

The princess turned away, covering her face with her sombre veil and mourning with a grief that would have more than satisfied him for whom it flowed.

The knights gathered around to perform the last sad offices for the dead. Hastily they constructed a funeral couch of the colors and lances his arm had won from the enemy in this last fatal encounter, and laid him tenderly upon it. Then they stood around the bier, with faces of deepest gloom, and eyes from which all their manhood could not banish the welling tears.

Followed by her women, the princess then drew near to do honor to the dead. Kneeling beside all that remained of Montmorency, they chanted the service of the dead, with voices so sweet and solemn, that his spirit as it winged its upward flight must surely have paused, well pleased to listen.

Thus the night passed in alternate prayers and lamentations. The following morning Matilda's escort, now become a funeral cortége, proceeded once more towards Ptolemaïs. Mourning took the place of anticipated rejoicing. They brought back, indeed, the Princess of England, but beside her was borne all that remained of her rescuer. If Richard would render thanks for his sister's safe return, Philip Augustus would demand of them in vain the flower and glory of his chivalry.

Soon the brilliant device shining upon the shields of the 'Knights of the Virgin' was recognized from the Crusaders' camp. Richard and Lusignan, forgetting their stately dignity, hastened to meet them. Philip Augustus followed close behind. Berengaria awaited, with ill-concealed impatience, tidings of her sister, while the Archbishop of Tyre before the altar, prepared to offer up to God his resignation for the failure of the knights, or thanks for the safe return of the best-loved lamb of his flock.

Enguerrand de Fiennes, with a mighty effort acceding to the general request, came forward to break the sad tidings to the sovereigns. Beholding his mournful bearing — his hesitation, Richard, with quick alarm, spoke the one word at that moment nearest his thoughts:

"Matilda?"

"The Princess of England is with us, Sire; in a few moments she will be in your arms."

"What!" cried Lusignan, "you return to us from

your glorious mission successful, yet the most profound dejection is depicted on your countenance!"

Enguerrand was silent, and his sorrowful eyes sought the ground. The two kings in mute surprise, longed yet dreaded to urge him to speech. Bad indeed, they knew must be those tidings which could thus overshadow the joy of Matilda's return. Only the death of Montmorency could cause such hopeless dejection. The lion-hearted Richard turned pale at the thought. Lusignan, envious of all glory surpassing his own, was less sensible to the effect of such a loss.

"Montmorency?" he said, in questioning tones.

Enguerrand bent his knee to the ground; with one hand he showed them the advancing bier, with the other he pointed to heaven.

Richard stood like one petrified; he already distinguished his sister's litter advancing towards him, and he made no motion to go forward to meet it; the very thought of happiness seemed to him a desecration, in the presence of so irreparable a calamity as that which her coming announced.

"Ah, Sire," he cried as Philip Augustus joined him: "it is with tears I announce to you my sister's return, dear as she is to me, it has been purchased at too fearful a cost!"

Even while Richard spoke, Philip Augustus perceived the young princess coming slowly towards them, and immediately following, a bier covered with a pall bearing the arms of the Montmorencys.

The great king trembled like a woman, and grief

took possession of his soul. He scarcely saw the Princess of England; forgetting her sex, her rank, her beauty, her prolonged captivity, and the perils through which she had passed; he greeted her only with a formal bow, and retired almost immediately to the privacy of his tent.

Not one smile, not one joyous glance welcomed the princess; her brother's embrace was one of sorrow instead of happiness, and the acclamations of joy which under other auspices would have welcomed the sister of Richard, were superseded by accents of grief.

The following day the obsequies of the unfortunate Montmorency were celebrated with great pomp. The various nationalities represented in the Crusaders' camp took part in the solemn ceremony, their colors draped with the sombre insignia of death. But there was one recognized by the *fleur-de-lis* upon its drooping banners, as well as by the profound grief — remarkable even amid such universal mourning — imprinted upon the countenances of its representatives. In Montmorency, the French mourned not only a hero stricken down in the flower of his age — a knight of the Cross, whose arm was the firmest support of the Faith, but a man whose glorious life shed precious lustre upon the land of his birth, and gave it a pre-eminence which must depart with himself.

In accordance with his dying request, Montmorency's remains were deposited a short distance from Ptolemaïs. At the entrance of a grove of sycamores, on the brow of a slight elevation commanding a view

of the city, the last resting-place of the young knight had been prepared. His grave was covered with the spoils of his last victory, and the warriors assembled to do him honor, knowing so well the daring and valor of Montmorency, yet marvelled as they beheld the fruits of so unequal a contest.

When the religious ceremonies, conducted by the venerable Archbishop of Tyre, had been concluded, Philip Augustus approached the grave, and lowering above it the point of his sword, said:

"O Montmorency! half my kingdom would I give to purchase back thy noble life, the remainder for the power to avenge thee! Cowards that they were to oppose a force like theirs against the arms of one man! Let the Infidels perish to the last man, to expiate the death they have dealt thee! Oh, you who hear me, men of many nations but of one creed, swear with me, henceforth to spare no Mussulman!' And you, Madam," he added, turning towards Matilda, who in robes of deepest mourning was kneeling beside the grave,— "you to whom prayers are more befitting than deeds, — ask God to strike with the thunderbolt of His wrath that which the empire of the Crescent most prizes — most prides itself upon."

"Sire," replied the young girl, raising her tearful eyes to his, "permit me to pray only as *he* would have prayed. Let me ask of God only such things as his magnanimous spirit would have approved."

As she recalled Montmorency's last words, his last generous thought for his rival, the princess could no

longer restrain her grief, and Philip Augustus, and others who witnessed her tears, no longer doubted that a tenderer, deeper regret added its incense to the universal sorrow for the departed knight.

CHAPTER II.

BERENGARIA impatiently awaited the moment when, without impropriety, she might question Matilda concerning Malek Adhel, and discover whether the importunate passion of the prince, under auspices so favorable, had been rewarded by kinder feeling on the part of her sister.

Matilda's agitation was evident when the name of her lover was first mentioned by the queen, but she gave no other sign, and Berengaria, resolving to understand the matter, showed her a sympathy which under most circumstances would have entrapped the young girl's confidence. But Matilda had already gained a little worldly wisdom, and dared not entrust to her anything she desired to conceal from Richard. Loving and honoring her haughty brother, she yet feared him too much to permit him to share the timid secrets of her innocent heart.

"Since your departure from Damietta," she said, in reply to Berengaria's importunity, "I have received from Malek Adhel such constant proofs of a delicate and devoted affection, that my heart must

indeed have been hardened not to have been touched; but whether more so than was befitting, I know not. William can best inform me, Sister; I must speak with him ere I can tell you whether the sentiment which I entertain for the Saracen prince has really overstepped the strict boundary of gratitude."

Oh, mirror-like candor of youth—already tarnished by the breath of love! is the wearisome struggle of the past so soon forgotten? Has that solemn vow registered in the desert—with silence and death hovering near, and the holy heavens above bearing witness—already faded from memory?

The downcast eyes, the flushing forehead, belied the doubt; but how could she describe to others scenes almost as sacred and solemn to her, as her religion,—how picture them to others who could never apprehend their full, spiritual significance? No, she could not do it.

And yet her religious duty forbade any reserve from the archbishop; even had she evaded the confession, his penetrating eye, accustomed to the perusal of her inmost thoughts, would have discerned what she would fain have concealed. As she recalled the past, she could not believe that in the solemn moments she had deemed her last upon earth, she had erred in avowing a love which the approaching hand of death seemed to sanctify; and yet, would William, who had not watched with her the unfolding of events, nor penetrated into the apparently trivial minutiæ which go to make up the completeness of circumstances, who could

not see with her sight, feel with her heart, would he adjudge her guiltless? Would not he, so wise, so severe, chide a weakness with which he could feel no sympathy, and forbid even regret for a happiness religion denied her? Habituated to submission, she knew not how she should resist his commands, nor yet, should they require of her the sacrifice of her love for Malek Adhel, how she could possibly yield obedience.

A prey to such uncertainty, the princess evaded all opportunities for private conversation with the archbishop; and the better to avoid an interview she perceived that he was seeking, she lived a less retired life than she had hitherto done, and, rarely quitting the queen's side, mingled oftener with the gay world.

Since Berengaria's return to the camp she had held a large and brilliant court, where the most illustrious among the kings and knights considered it an honor to be admitted. Here the Princess Matilda, issuing from her strict seclusion and monastic habit, first appeared in all the untrammelled splendor of her beauty and exalted rank. In her presence the celebrated court beauties sank back into the obscurity of ordinary women, their artificial charms eclipsed by her fresh loveliness and refined simplicity of manner. This sudden change in the princess' mode of life, gave birth to a hope that she had finally decided against the religious vocation to which she had been destined; besides, love had taught her a less austere bearing, and conscious weakness a kindlier sympathy for the faults of her fellow-creatures; the object of universal homage and respect as before,

she now became likewise the "bright particular star" upon which the greatest kings and knights of the Christian world gazed with aspiring worship.

The King of Naples, Bohemond of Antioch, Raymond of Tripoli, the Duke of Athens, and more importunate than all, the King of Jerusalem, vied with each other in endeavors to win from her an encouraging word or look.

The more serious business of war being for a moment suspended, the camp resounded with the noise of joust and tournament, of which the princess, by general acclamation, was ever pronounced queen of love and beauty. Surrounded by such flattering homage, kind and gentle to all, Matilda yielded to none especial marks of her favor, unless they might so consider the evident pleasure she experienced in the society of the venerable Hugh of Tiberias.

Hugh had for several years resided, a prisoner but in name, at the court of Saladin. He knew and admired Malek Adhel. It was from his hand the prince had received the accolade of knighthood. Hugh loved to honor and extol the courage, generosity, and greatness of soul, which united to make him an accomplished prince. To Malek Adhel he owed his liberty, that of his family, and his wealth, which through the influence of that prince had been restored to him. No wonder then that the aged knight always spoke of Saladin's brother in terms of enthusiastic praise, or that Matilda never wearied of hearing him.

The same reasons which gave such charm to the

conversation of Count Hugh, induced the princess to appear more frequently at the tournaments.

The Saracens, during periods of truce, often approached the Crusaders' camp, and even ventured not infrequently to measure lances with them in the jousts which took place beneath the walls of Ptolemaïs. The two champions of the opposing armies entering the lists first agreed upon terms, usually the surrender of the vanquished as prisoner of war, and these articles were faithfully adhered to on either side. A certain degree of familiarity was thus produced, the Crusaders often dancing to the music of the Arabian instruments, the Saracens joining their voices to the songs of knights and troubadours.

These frequent opportunities for communication sometimes enabled the princess to question the Infidels in the hope of obtaining tidings of Malek Adhel, but so far her success had been indifferent, and while they gave due honor to their greatest warrior, they possessed no later information concerning him than she had gained from Kaled's words spoken in her presence ere leaving Cairo.

But one day, during one of the most brilliant entertainments held in Ptolemaïs since the princess' return, a young Arab presented himself at the lists. He was mounted on a magnificent animal. His bearing was proud and confident; the visor of his helmet was lowered. He proposed to break a lance with the first two champions who would honor him by accepting the challenge, and asked, for guerdon of victory, only per-

mission to salute the Princess of England, and afterwards to depart without disclosing his identity.

The terms were accepted, and Matilda was requested to select from among the Crusaders the opponents of the Infidel.

A sudden intuition impelled her to name those warriors less noted for their prowess; and at her command the Prince of Galilee and the Count of Jaffa entered the arena.

The Arab retired to his station, poised his lance, and advancing, met his opponents midway, breaking the lance of the first and overthrowing the other. Then having accomplished his facile victory, he directed his prancing steed towards the princess' balcony.

Matilda divining from whence he came, awaited him with a beating heart. Lusignan, standing beside her, demurred at a success so cheaply purchased, and was disposed to challenge him in turn, but the princess interfered.

"Sire," she said, "the conditions of the combat have been fulfilled; honor will not permit you to propose a second tilt."

Lusignan hesitated, impatient at the restraint imposed upon him by the princess. But the umpires seconded Matilda's opinion, and decided that the victorious Arab should receive the guerdon for which he had contended.

The Arab, throwing the reins of his horse to one of the equerries of the camp, mounted the steps leading to the balcony of the princess. Bending his knee to the

ground, he bowed before Matilda, kissing the hem of her dress; then rising, he whispered:

"Malek Adhel has vanquished Saladin's army at Cairo. He is now at Cæsarea; 'tis he who sends me to you, for he could no longer endure the anxiety he felt on your account. I am Kaled."

A vivid blush overspread the young girl's face; in her confusion she could find no words to reply, and ere she had regained her self-possession, the Arab had already departed.

Joy at the welcome tidings, regret for having sent no message in return, agitated the princess so perceptibly, that all eyes were turned upon her. The queen, smiling softly, pressed her hand; the Archbishop of Tyre added to her confusion by gazing at her with a severe and piercing eye; Richard openly questioned her.

"Do you know this Infidel, Matilda?" he asked.

"If I do, Sire, would not the terms upon which he entered the lists prevent me from revealing what he may have disclosed only to myself?" she answered, the crimson deepening on her cheek.

"As your brother and your king, I may perhaps exact the confession from you," he answered coldly.

"But as the most gallant knight on earth, you will desist from doing so," interposed Philip Augustus. "What wonder that a lady whose beauty is unrivalled, should attract homage from every nation of the universe!"

Richard smiled with recovered good humor.

"Why these blushes, fair sister," he said in jesting tones: "when, just after passing the threshold of your convent, you met the admiring looks of men, your timidity was at least excusable; but after traversing oceans and deserts, after receiving the vows of the greatest of warriors, when even our enemies, succumbing to your charms, venture into our camp to assure you of their fealty, and the King of France himself finds in your beauty ample excuse for their temerity, you should exercise more self-possession, and learn how to endure glances you have known how to attract."

Her brother's persistent notice was not calculated to reassure the young girl. She cast a shy, pleading glance towards Berengaria. The queen, without appearing to have perceived the look, presently rose, declaring she was wearied and wished to retire; and Matilda, according to her wont, followed her sister.

Lusignan obtained Richard's permission to accompany the queen and Matilda to their litters. As he rejoined the latter, he said in low tones:

"And now, Madam, that the conditions of the tilt have been fulfilled, may I not, without breach of the code of knightly honor, and without risk of incurring your displeasure, seek an encounter with this stranger whose victory I envy infinitely less than the interest with which he appeared to inspire you?"

"Sire," replied the princess haughtily, "my brother himself, while he commented upon my lack of self-possession, did not presume to accuse me of having shown undue interest in the stranger. As for this un-

known knight, should you succeed in reaching him, I possess no right to prevent you from fighting him."

"I shall reach him, Madam; I shall overcome him, be he Malek Adhel himself."

Matilda looked the incredulity she was too courteous to express. Lusignan perceived her thought.

"Your Highness, then, deems him invincible?"

"It seems to me," she replied, smiling, "that until now, that is the only thing for which the Christians have reproached Malek Adhel."

They had now reached the spot where their conveyances awaited them, and the princess, with a slight inclination of her head, entered her litter without permitting the King of Jerusalem an opportunity for reply.

Left to himself, Lusignan turned back, musing with no pleasurable sensation upon the manner in which Matilda had mentioned Malek Adhel, and beginning to suspect that Montmorency's death had not delivered him from the most formidable of his rivals. Love and ambition rendered him equally desirous of obtaining the Princess of England's hand. Richard was greatly attached to him, and had promised to maintain his rights. But that was not sufficient; Richard's attachment must induce him to compass this marriage; thus, becoming personally interested in his cause, he would dare all things to restore the throne of Jerusalem to him whom he had named brother. Lusignan was convinced that only by means of this alliance could he succeed in reconquering his throne; and he was filled with rage

and dread at the thought of the overtures which had been proposed to Malek Adhel.

He had heard much of the passion which the prince had conceived for his lovely captive. If she had responded to that love and had succeeded in leading him from his errors into the fold of the true faith, could Richard well refuse her to him? Lusignan, as he pondered, did not deny that this alliance would be of inestimable advantage to the cause of Christianity, but it would be the death of all his personal hopes, and he was determined to oppose it.

A prey to anxiety and depression, he did not return to the scenes of revelry he had just quitted, but repaired to the shores of the sea, where he walked with listless tread, cogitating means to overcome the obstacles that impeded his progress towards the goal of his ambition. Here he was presently joined by Richard who, perceiving his depression, reproached him for his silence.

Lusignan intimated that delicacy would not permit him to disclose his trouble to him who alone possessed the power to alleviate it.

Richard with a smile of encouragement insisted upon the confession, and Lusignan, as though yielding to the demand of friendship, murmured Matilda's name.

"My heart has long since acknowledged you my brother, Lusignan," said Richard affectionately, "depend upon it, my sister's hand shall confirm the title."

The exultation of Lusignan was only equalled by his joy; but moderating his transports, he said, doubtfully:

"Most things are possible to you, illustrious King; but can you control the fancy of the Princess Matilda?"

"If her heart is still free," answered Richard, "I can readily mould it to my will. If not... we shall see!"

CHAPTER III.

INTERESTED now beyond measure in gratifying the desire of his brother-in-arms, Richard went that very day to his sister's apartments, where he found the princess with Berengaria and the Archbishop of Tyre.

"Matilda," he began, "on the occasion of the funeral ceremony of our noble Montmorency, you were habited in robes of the deepest mourning, nor have you, though mingling in the festivities of the court, yet altogether discarded them. While, on the occasion mentioned, I could not but approve this public testimonial of regret for an irreparable loss, I must at the same time inform you that its continuance subjects you to the suspicion that something more than mere gratitude towards your deliverer mingles with your regret."

"If such be the case, Sire," replied Matilda, composedly, "I shall leave off my mourning this very day, and resume the simple dress I wear as a novice."

"No, not that," hastily replied Richard; "it is time, indeed, that we should arrive at some understanding upon this subject. Since your return, I have remarked in you less repugnance to the fascinations of society,

and it has even occurred to me that you seem less observant of the religious exercises which formerly so constantly engrossed you. This change, I confess, has inspired me with the hope that you would eventually renounce your contemplated vows, not that I lack respect for the state to which you once purposed consecrating your life, but the example of your virtues will shine with greater lustre on a broader expanse; and destiny calls you to a throne rather than to a cloister.

"I behold a host of princes at your feet; among the aspirants to your hand the King of Jerusalem holds the highest rank; but neither his personal qualities nor the friendship I bear him seem to produce the slightest impression upon you; you are as indifferent to him as to all others. I know that while in Damietta you continued unrelenting. Both the archbishop and the queen have informed me that the rare and brilliant virtues of the Saracen prince did not prevent you from rejecting his advances with the coldest disdain. Is your heart then inaccessible, fair sister, to the tenderer emotions? Will you never bend to the influence of human love?"

"What," replied Matilda, with an arch smile, evading a direct answer to his question, "does your majesty reproach me for my indifference? Would you have approved of my smiling upon the suit of a Mussulman?"

"If the noble qualities of Saladin's brother had favorably impressed you," Richard gravely replied, "I should have wondered little, and have bestowed but slight anxiety upon the matter, confident that your piety and good sense would have readily triumphed over such

unseemly weakness; I should rather have hoped that if an Infidel had succeeded in touching your heart, a Christian prince, the object of my closest friendship, his suit seconded by my own earnest wishes, would have met with still better success."

"And those hopes would probably have been disappointed," replied Matilda firmly. "I know not what fate awaits me; but were it possible for me to conceive the thought of marriage, no power on earth could induce me to forget the object of my preference."

"If you are endowed with such rare constancy," said the king, smiling, "I must return thanks to Heaven for your indifference to Malek Adhel; for assuredly, great as is the affection I bear you, I would far rather see you dead, than have you love a Mussulman. But tell me honestly, Matilda, is it possible that among all the princes and knights who surround you, not one has succeeded in tempting you to renounce your cloister?"

"Not one," replied the princess.

"And so you still persist in your resolve to consecrate yourself to a religious vocation?"

At this direct question the young girl's brow was suffused with crimson blushes; her eyes sought the ground and she remained silent.

"You do not answer me, Matilda; if it is no preference for conventual life which forbids your entertaining any thought of marriage, what other motive can you advance?"

His sister's sole reply was to silently brush away

the tears she could not altogether repress. The king looked at her in surprise, then added:

"I perceive that some strange secret weighs upon your mind. I will respect your maidenly timidity, and question you no further on the subject; but since you are accustomed to confess without reserve to the saintly archbishop, I may presume that he is already acquainted with the matter which thus troubles you; and I beg that you will permit him to give me the desired information."

"Sire," William gravely interposed, "her highness since her return, has not once deigned to avail herself of my holy offices, and her frame of mind is as unknown to me as to yourself."

"What do I hear!" cried Richard, with increasing surprise: "after so long an exile among Infidels, my pious sister has had no confession to make! Her first care on her arrival here was not to prepare herself for the reception of the bread of life — she who heretofore deemed herself culpable, if but a week passed without having sought absolution for sins for which an angel would not have blushed?"

"Since her return," replied the prelate, "the princess has regularly attended all the ceremonies of the church, but she has participated in none."

"Is it possible!" interrupted the king: "and to what cause must we attribute this change in my sister? You are silent, Matilda, and your eyes, no longer candid, turn from mine with an unwonted confusion. But these blushes, these tears, would seem to indicate that

repentance has at last penetrated your heart, and that you will not longer maintain a silence, which, if continued, might arouse within me strange suspicions. I leave you with the venerable archbishop; open your heart to him, and may he hear nothing which would diminish my affection for you, or cause me to regret having yielded my consent to your accompanying me to Palestine."

He had spoken with such unwonted severity that Matilda was overcome with fear. Berengaria would have drawn near to offer the consolation of loving words, but Richard would not permit it, and departed, taking the queen with him.

The dreaded interview was forced upon her at last. With downcast eyes and trembling voice, the young girl approached the archbishop.

"I know not, Father, what suspicions Richard has conceived, nor whether you share them . . . "

"My daughter," interrupted William, "how shall I understand your words? Have you not sufficiently erred in keeping silence — would you also try deceit? Do not hope to succeed. I know you too well; I have fathomed the innermost recesses of your weak heart — that heart you would not close to me, did it contain nothing of which you need be ashamed — that heart which has forgotten its God to yield itself to the blandishments of an idolater."

"Father," replied the princess meekly, "this idolater is he who has restored the queen to her husband; who has broken your chains and mine; he whose

virtues, extolled throughout the East, have also been admired by the Christian world—even by yourself."

"I am fully aware of this, my daughter," replied William: "I know Malek Adhel, and appreciate the ordeal of temptation to which I left you exposed. Doubtless the most exalted virtue was necessary to enable one to resist him. I believed you thus endowed, and hoped to welcome you back with blessings for so glorious a triumph. God has refused me so great a joy!"

The venerable prelate was overcome with emotion, and tears rolled slowly down his furrowed cheeks.

The sight touched the young girl more than his words of censure.

"I have, indeed, sinned, Father," she murmured, "but if you could but know the strange circumstances by which I was surrounded; the perils from which Malek Adhel rescued me; the sacrifices he made for my sake; pity would perhaps succeed to your contempt."

"I condemn you not, my child, for I know the Eternal calls not all his children to victory; but to all the paths of repentance are open. If you have faltered in the hour of temptation, return to God with the greater humility, and your passion-tossed heart will find renewed calm."

The princess knelt before the archbishop, and buried her tear-stained face in her hands.

"Father, hear me," she said, "receive the confession of my sad secret. . . . . But what words shall I use?

How tell you that a solemn vow — a secret tie — aye, duty itself, binds me to Malek Adhel?"

"My God," cried the archbishop, "what bitterness didst Thou reserve to my old age! This proud chaste maiden — this saint among women, has fallen a prey to the lusts of a Mussulman!"

"Father, what mean you? With what foul suspicion would you insult me?" cried the princess, starting to her feet, with all the pride of her womanly dignity and exalted rank flushing her beautiful face. "I was abandoned with Malek Adhel in the wastes of the desert; he sacrificed his own life rather than leave me to perish alone. With death brooding above us — alone with the God to whom we thought so soon to render our account, I loved — I promised, but in naming him my betrothed — my husband, he consented to take also the name of Christian, to follow me to the throne of the Most High."

"Omnipotent God, I thank thee!" cried William, lifting his trembling hands to Heaven, in fervent thanksgiving. "My child," he added presently, turning to the young girl; "you may open your heart to God without shame."

"So I have believed, Father," she answered meekly.

"Upon your knees, my daughter," he added, "thank the Divine mercy which has spared you."

The princess obeyed; but in her gentle heart she also blessed her lover, for she deemed her safety due to his respect, as well as to Divine protection.

After a few moments silence William again addressed her.

"My daughter," he said; "repeat these marvellous tidings: Malek Adhel has become a Christian?"

"When he believed himself dying, Father . . . "

"And upon being restored to life he turned again from the light of the true faith?"

"Had you been near him, Father, had your eloquence been permitted to enlighten him; could he have believed that the law of Christ would not oblige him to betray his country! . . . But I, timid and ignorant, what could I say? How dispute the subtle arguments of honor which seemed to forbid him to desert his country, his brother, his sovereign, in their hour of need? And yet God knows how dear to my heart was the thought of his conversion!"

"If I should ever succeed in planting the seeds of the true faith within the noble soul of Malek Adhel," cried the archbishop fervently, "I should ask of God no greater glory than to bless your union and die."

"And were Malek Adhel a Christian, you would permit me to love him, Father?" the princess asked with a sweet confusion.

"Doubtless, and I would also use all my influence in obtaining Richard's consent"

"But why should this influence be necessary, Father, surely my brother, while combatting error, is not the personal enemy of Malek Adhel?"

"Richard is an ardent admirer of the Saracen prince; but even were he a Christian, your brother

would perhaps hesitate to promise him your hand; for he has already engaged it . . . "

"Has already engaged my hand!" interrupted the princess indignantly. "But no," she added confidently; so rash a promise gives me little anxiety, my heart belongs only to myself, and no one possesses the right to dispose of my hand without it. My life shall be consecrated to God, or devoted to Malek Adhel. If God forbids this love, I shall endeavor to obey; but He only can separate me from him to whom I owe so much."

The archbishop regarded her with surprise, marvelling at the quiet firmness newly developed in a nature hitherto so submissive and meek, yet recalling her unyielding resistance to the temptations of love and circumstance, he began to perceive more assertive qualities which, with the passive ones he had hitherto loved in her, combined to form a character of rare excellence.

After a long silence William said sadly:

"My child, with your disposition, and Richard's — which in some measure resembles your own — I foresee for you great unhappiness should Malek Adhel persist in his errors."

"Aye, sorrow inexpressible would be mine at the thought of his eternal loss; beside this supreme misfortune no other could exist."

"My child," said the archbishop, with the fervent spirit of charity which distinguished his character: "if you can honestly assure me that you entertain well-founded hopes of the prince's conversion, do not hesi-

tate to do so. With the help of God, I will brave all difficulties, surmount all obstacles, to accomplish so great a work."

"It is true, Father, that Malek Adhel refused to follow me hither; but when I parted from him at Cairo, Saladin had threatened him, and he had decided to oppose him."

"Malek Adhel oppose Saladin!" cried the archbishop in amazement: "Oh, unheard-of miracle! Surely we may behold the hand of Providence in this extraordinary circumstance!"

"He had not only decided to meet him, but I know that an encounter has taken place, and that Malek Adhel was victorious. He is now at Cæsarea."

For some time the archbishop kept silence, musing upon the wonderful news he had just heard; then considering their importance, he bethought him of imparting them without delay to those who could best render them available.

"One day, my child, you will inform me through what means you have obtained such valuable information. At the present moment I must hasten to lay the matter before our chiefs. Our enemies have too long taken advantage of our unfortunate dissensions; it is but fair that we should avail ourselves of theirs."

"And must you reveal my secret to the king?" inquired Matilda anxiously. "Must I blush before him for a sentiment of which he disapproves? Yet, Father, if you judge that I deserve this mortification, I submit. Do by me as you think best."

"You deserve none, my child," said William kindly; "if you have shown some weakness, you have also gained wonderful triumphs; the strength which comes of God, is great within you. Richard shall know you as you are. He shall know that touched by the virtues of a great prince, recognizing the dangers from which he has saved you, filled particularly with the hope of converting him to the true faith, you have honored him with a preference for which the dignity of your sex and rank has no cause to blush, and over which religion will always exercise due control."

CHAPTER IV.

On entering Richard's apartments, the archbishop found him in consultation with the King of Jerusalem and the Duke of Burgundy.

Turning to William with some emotion, Richard informed him that the French army had just lost its chief, Philip Augustus having taken his departure for Europe, leaving the Duke of Burgundy as his representative.

The archbishop was already aware of the fact; the King of France having previously confided his intentions to him; for such was the estimation in which William was universally held, that the most puissant monarchs always consulted him before engaging in any undertaking; and required their plans, ere adopted, to be sanctioned by his approval.

But Richard regarded with anxiety the departure of

his young and brilliant rival; he dreaded his ambition, and suspected him of being capable of taking advantage of his absence to take arms against England.

William emphatically denounced a suspicion so injurious to the honor of Philip Augustus.

"With a power as great as that he possesses," said he, "the King of France could doubtless achieve much; but his actions will always be dictated by a spirit of justice and magnanimity. Suffer him then, to return home to settle the difficulties that distract his kingdom, and instead of these unwarrantable suspicions, rather pity him that he will not behold Jerusalem. Providence seems to send us aid from an unexpected quarter to open the way to us. The two lions who guarded it are at open war. Saladin and Malek Adhel are no longer united in amity; their armies have met at Cairo; Saladin's has been beaten, and Malek Adhel, triumphant, is now in Cæsarea. If appearances are not deceptive, he is there not to defend the city against us, but to guard it against his brother."

The tidings announced by the archbishop greatly surprised his hearers. The Duke of Burgundy advovocated immediately sending an embassy to Malek Adhel, offering to accept his own terms for an alliance.

Lusignan violently opposed the proposition.

"Is it not evident," he exclaimed, "that the hand of the Princess Matilda will be his first demand? And can an Infidel's alliance be of such importance that in order to obtain it, we must needs sacrifice the most valuable treasure we possess?"

"If you reflect that the Infidel of whom you speak, is Malek Adhel," retorted the Duke of Burgundy, "I defy you to suggest aught that would be more auspicious to our cause than his support. And as regards the sacrifice you intimate, if I may make bold to speak my mind, I doubt if the Princess of England would consider it in that light."

"Would you presume to suspect my sister of the folly of loving a Mussulman?" cried Richard with some show of irritation.

"Would that be folly, Sire," interposed the archbishop, "which would recognize the great qualities of Malek Adhel; which would desire to attach him to our side by opening his eyes to the true light? And if, as guerdon of so great a victory, your sister had promised him her hand . . ."

"My sister could not so have promised!" Richard passionately retorted: "she is too well aware of her duties, and of my rights, to dare to engage herself. I alone am entitled to dispose of her hand, and I have already done so. Had she persisted in her previous intention of assuming the veil, I should not have interposed my authority between her and the holy life she had chosen; but since her views on that subject have changed, Lusignan shall be her husband, and I swear she shall have none other!"

The Duke of Burgundy ventured to represent to the king how fatal to the Crusaders' cause this resolution might prove.

"This is so evidently the case, Sire," he cried, "that

if Malek Adhel embraced Christianity, you would behold the councils of the princes, the wishes of the Crusaders, aye, the whole Christian world, imploring your consent to the most propitious alliance the princess could possibly form in the interests of religion. You could not resist . . ."

"And why should not the King of England resist such unwarrantable importunity?" cried Lusignan, insolently. "Has he not around him warriors of valor equal to Malek Adhel's? Must Christians succumb without the aid of an Infidel? Oh, if the ardor which fills my soul could but animate my brothers, with what scorn would we repel the advances of this Mussulman!"

"Lusignan," said the archbishop severely, "has not the loss of your kingdom sufficed to teach you a lesson of humility? Has not your arrogant pride been appeased by the wretched quarrels inaugurated by you, which have so nearly proved fatal to the cause of religion? Are you not content with the acknowledgement of your claims to a throne your valor was not equal to retaining? Must you needs now hold Richard to a promise contrary to the interests of God, and from which you would prove yourself strangely guilty in not releasing him on the instant?"

"Reverend Father," interposed Richard, scarcely controlling his anger, "do you not exceed the limits of your priestly prerogative? Are you entitled to the privilege of judging between the King of Jerusalem and myself?"

"It is my privilege and my duty," replied William,

with grave dignity, "to defend religion against whomsoever presumes to seek to do it injury; it is my privilege and my duty also, to sustain the innocent and the oppressed; and if in public I have never omitted the respect due to those in authority, it is still incumbent upon me to speak to them privately as men — as men not exempt from the errors and weaknesses of their less exalted fellow-beings. To you, Richard, I openly declare that should you, abusing your power as brother and king, attempt to tyrannize over your sister, the Princess Matilda, I shall use all the influence of my sacred calling in her defence. And you, Lusignan," turning toward the King of Jerusalem, "should you, blinded by a selfish passion, constrain Richard to fulfil a promise wrung from his indiscreet friendship, and oblige him to refuse an alliance which would restore the holy city to us, even one day sooner, know that my duty would be to declare you unworthy of possessing it — and I have never yet threatened unjustly, or in vain."

Inclining his haughty head to the kings, William then left the room.

"What matter to me his overweening zeal, his self-opiniated obstinacy," cried Lusignan; "what care I for his vain threats — or those of the council itself! Nothing should change my determination, Richard, were I but assured of your support!"

"Do you doubt my honor?" demanded Richard with some asperity.

Perceiving his mistake, Lusignan quickly threw his arms about the impetuous, but honest-hearted king.

"Forgive me, Brother," he said penitently; "recent events have somewhat soured me, perhaps; but never again shall mistrust overshadow my affection for you."

"Enough!" quoth Richard, bluntly. "Leave protestations to women, acts belong to men; you will see that I shall not fail you. And now to the call of public interests. Malek Adhel is in Cæsarea, William informs us; and though he does not avow the source of his knowledge, we know he is not one to speak without authority. Let us, then, acquaint ourselves with the intentions of the Saracen prince. If these tidings prove reliable, and Saladin's brother has indeed rebelled against his authority, we can watch our opportunity and take advantage of their quarrel to push forward to victory."

The Duke of Burgundy approved this plan, and Lusignan dared not hazard an objection which might seem to savor of some remaining suspicion of Richard's integrity.

A council of war was hastily convened. Richard first addressed the assembly. He reviewed the events which had recently transpired at Cairo, giving the name of the archbishop as authority for the information. Nor did he conceal the fact of a dawning hope that Malek Adhel might be induced to join his arms with those of the Christians.

They gave him no opportunity to express his views on the subject; so great was the joy throughout the assembly at such unexpected tidings, that it could not be restrained within the bounds of formal decorum; and

amid loud *huzzas* on the part of the English, *bravos* and *vivas* from the French and Italians, and various other characteristic cries of delight from the several nationalities represented, the wildest excitement prevailed for several minutes.

The bishops, more particularly, supported by the pope's legate, affirmed that the conversion of Malek Adhel was of infinitely greater moment to the cause of Christianity than any mere conquest of territory; and that whoever should oppose the conditions required of them by the Saracen prince for his alliance, should be regarded as guilty in the sight of God and before men.

At this Lusignan rose in fierce anger, replying that it was with extreme mortification he heard Christians placing dependence upon the support of an Infidel, and consenting to his alliance upon his own terms.

"What!" cried he, "have we so little faith in God, and in ourselves, that we cannot hope for victory unless Malek Adhel is with us? Have we become so degenerate that we may not number his equals in valor among our own warriors? Montmorency has fallen, 'tis true, but Richard still lives; and if Philip Augustus has abandoned us, the valiant Duke of Burgundy remains. And you, illustrious Count of Saint Paul; you, Esmengards d'Asp, noble head of the invincible order of Hospitallers — you who have never recoiled before the enemy, do you not blush with indignation to behold Christians exalting the courage of an Infidel above your own, and ready to pay for his protection a price they would refuse to your devotion? I ask of you all, young

and dauntless knights who have vowed your lives to the defence of beauty in distress, are you willing that in order to obtain the questionable advantage of being commanded by a Mussulman, that the Princess of England should be sacrificed to him?"

Cries of dissent arose on all sides. The princes who aspired to Matilda's hand rose, and indignantly proclaimed that they would never permit her to become the prey of an infidel.

Hereupon the Archbishop of Tyre requested to be heard, and before his venerable presence the tempest of angry passions was calmed into silence.

"It would seem," he began, "that the King of Jerusalem has misunderstood, or misinterpreted the intentions and motives of that portion of this assembly which has pronounced in favor of Malek Adhel. God forbid that we should wish to behold Christians led by an Infided; or that we should think of urging upon the august sister of Richard the suit of an unbeliever. But in embracing Christianity, Malek Adhel would cease to be an Infidel; from an enemy he would become our most efficient support; exalted by a glorious baptism far above the rank of birth, he would be worthy of the highest honors it would be in our power to bestow upon him. And yet, if he asks the hand of the Princess Matilda, from all quarters you exclaim against such a sacrifice. I agree with you there, she must not be sacrificed. But are not the interests of Christianity the first desire in the heart of that pure and pious maiden? All that Religion shall require of her will be obtained; and

I am the foremost to declare that should Malek Adhel demand her hand, it shall be granted him only with her free and full consent."

The address of the archbishop was received with an almost unanimous approval, no one daring to question the justice and good sense of his reasoning.

"And now," said the Duke of Burgundy, "our first move should be to send a detachment of troops to Cæsarea to learn what reliance we may place upon Malek Adhel; our second will be the choice of a chief to command them; so signal an honor would doubtless be the subject of eager contention were it possible, in the absence of Philip Augustus, to contend against Richard."

The unanimous applause of the assembly announced approval of the choice suggested.

Lusignan requested to be permitted to accompany the King of England to Cæsarea; but the proposition was met with a strong opposition. The members of the council argued that during the absence of Richard the camp was liable to an attack from Saladin's forces, and Lusignan's presence was necessary in case of this emergency. William's opinion confirmed their decision; and the King of Jerusalem, frustrated at every turn, was fain to hide his mortification and chagrin as best he might, until some more opportune moment should give him the ascendency.

Proud and elated at the token of esteem and confidence he had just received from the Crusader princes, Richard was eager to prove himself worthy of them.

He immediately announced that within a few hours he should be far on his way towards Cæsarea, and forthwith repaired to the camp to select the soldiers whom he desired to have accompany him on the expedition.

In a short address he communicated to the men his mission, and depicted the triumph of their entry into Cæsarea. Suggesting the hope that Malek Adhel himself would lend the strength of his arm and influence in favor of their cause.

At these words the wildest joy prevailed; throughout the camp were heard expressions of confidence in the success of that cause which Malek Adhel should uphold; of contempt for the power of the Mussulmans should he abandon them.

Richard was astonished at the effect produced by his announcement. The glory of the Saracen prince seemed exalted above his own, by his own people. His supreme ambition had been to acquire the name of the first captain of the age. In disputing this coveted rank with him, Philip Augustus had incurred his hatred; should he now yield to a Mussulman a pre-eminence refused to the monarch of the most powerful Christian empire? The very men he had just honored by selecting them for the expedition, had shown less enthusiasm in acknowledging him their leader, than in the anticipation of fighting on the side of Malek Adhel.

The thought filled his heart with a spirit of bitter jealousy; and the vows which his affection for Lusignan had suggested, were in that hour confirmed by his hatred for Malek Adhel. A prey to corroding thoughts,

Richard entered his tent to array himself in his armor. While his gentle wife endeavored to assist him, vengeful words in connection with the name of the Saracen prince, from time to time escaped him.

Berengaria, mistaking his wrath for anxiety lest he should succumb to Malek Adhel, endeavored to reassure him. Her ill-timed efforts only added to his irritation.

She repeated to him the benefits the Saracen prince had conferred upon his wife and sister, described the advantages which would accrue to the Christians from his alliance, and assured him that even should Malek Adhel, remaining faithful to Saladin, be victorious, she should still feel no great anxiety, for he had given his word to respect the life of her husband.

At this climax the fury of Richard burst all bounds; to be spared by Malek Adhel was an affront far beyond that of open rivalry. He turned fiercely upon the queen.

"Say but another word in his favor," he cried, furiously, "and I shall begin to suspect that you have not been altogether inaccessible to qualities you seem so anxious to extol!"

Overwhelmed by this insult, Berengaria turned from him with a silent dignity more expressive than words of reproach, and the king, bearing in his heart a fresh cause for rancor towards him who had been the cause of a wrong for which he blushed, proceeded to the apartments of his sister.

He found the princess at prayer, and without apologizing for his intrusion entered. The young girl

trembled with a vague foreboding as she saw his lowering brow and firm, pale lips.

"Fair sister," he began; "I am on the point of departure for Cæsarea. I shall surprise the city, and perhaps carry it by storm. It is reported that the prince who defends it is disposed to take sides with us; the information has probably reached William through you. From the same source, doubtless, we learn that in Cairo, Malek Adhel has already raised the standard of revolt against Saladin. I do not pause to consider whether such conduct is consistent with honor, or whether Christianity should exult in an acquisition owed to love, and obtained by perjury. I do not care to inquire with what sentiments you would receive the suit of a prince who could wed you and embrace our faith only through a violation of the most sacred ties of blood and of country. All this has no interest for me. The only subjects worthy of my care are the triumph of the Cross, and the fulfilment of my vows. I promised to restore Jerusalem to the Christians. I shall restore it to them. I promised Lusignan your hand in marriage; he shall have it. In this respect, I neither know, nor seek to know, your inclinations; the daughters of kings should possess none; their destinies are ruled by the will of their kindred and by the interests of their country . . . "

"Sire," interposed the young girl, "do you forget my vows, my cloister?"

"Cloisters are now out of the question," Richard answered vehemently; "so celebrated a beauty has

lost the privilege of devoting herself to the obscurity of a convent; the lustre of your fame already eclipses the splendor that encompasses a throne. That of Jerusalem awaits you. The conquest of Cæsarea will open the way to that city. If the prince, Malek Adhel, assists in its subjugation, I shall accept his services; but if your hand is the price he asks in exchange, remember this: that even should the council of the Crusaders urge you to accede to his demand, your brother and your king forbids it. A conversion can be worthy of respect only inasmuch as it is pure and disinterested. If the prince is sincere in his adoption of our faith, he should require no recompense; if he is not, would you bind yourself to him? Let him then assist us if he will, without conditions, to reconquer Jerusalem; if not, let him remain in his errors. We shall find the path which leads to victory without his assistance. It is with arms I shall persuade him, forsooth; and in taking his life, I shall deliver Christianity of its most potent enemy, and my sister of a presumptuous suitor, whom her piety will soon teach her to forget."

As he concluded, Richard turned on his heel and hastily quitted the room without caring to look at a countenance on which, intuition whispered him, was imprinted the tragedy of a young life.

CHAPTER V.

Two armies were moving towards Cæsarea whither as the present seat of war, the eyes of all the Orient were directed.

While from the seaward side Richard had just reached a wooded acclivity whence he could easily distinguish the minarets of Cæsarea, Saladin, from the opposite direction, had arrived beneath the walls of the city; and Malek Adhel, informed of his brother's approach, was preparing to receive him.

The Christians, perceiving the numerous army of the sultan spreading itself out upon the plain, took advantage of the shelter of the wood to observe, unsuspected, the unfolding of events which must so greatly influence the fortunes of the day. But the distance was still too great to permit them more than a general view of the movement of the troops, and those of individuals altogether escaped them. They could not distinguish the person of Saladin advancing, white with rage, towards the main gate of the city, nor Malek Adhel, with submissive dignity, coming forward to meet him.

This mark of obedience in no wise appeased the sultan's anger, and reflecting upon the revolt of Cairo, which placed the prince beyond hope of pardon, he could not but attribute this unexpected act of submission to fear.

"Losing honor, he has covered himself with the mantle of humility," muttered Saladin scornfully, and without deigning to look at his brother, he turned to the guard of honor who attended him.

"Seize the rebel!" he ordered sternly, "and let your steel drink his blood on the instant."

The men could not believe the evidence of their senses; Malek Adhel, the sultan's brother, the bravest officer of the East, condemned to such an unseemly and dishonorable death! For one brief moment, astonishment stayed the movement of the sultan's guard, and Malek Adhel's soldiers profited by that moment to snatch their beloved chief from a peril against which he was unprepared to defend himself; and to surround him with the ægis of their own loyal hearts.

Infuriated by this open defiance of his authority, Saladin drew his cimeter, and calling upon his soldiers to follow him, rushed upon the offenders, who without awaiting the commands of the prince, disregarding the superiority of numbers of the attacking party, met them half-way, and a short but fearful conflict ensued.

But the enthusiastic devotion of the soldiers of Malek Adhel to their young prince, nerved them to unwonted powers of exertion and endurance; while those of Saladin fought — by the sultan's will, and not their own — their former companions-in-arms, and against one who was endeared to them by the many brilliant victories they had won under his command.

Ere long the sultan's troops began to falter; and presently the haughty Saladin himself was forced to retire.

From their elevated position the Christians had watched the combat; they no longer doubted that Malek Adhel was in open revolt, and that the auspicious moment they awaited, had arrived. Suddenly rushing upon the rear-guard of Saladin's army, they surprised, and cut it to pieces; the rout was complete.

Beholding himself attacked on all sides, Saladin began to participate in the panic which had already taken possession of his army, whole sections of which succumbed without striking a blow. Within an incredibly short space of time the Christians had taken so many prisoners that they were embarrassed by their number.

Finally Richard dispatched a message desiring the presence of the Prince of Taranto.

"Take with you," he said, "fifteen thousand men, and conduct our prisoners to Ptolemaïs. Announce our victory. Our brothers will rejoice to know that Malek Adhel is with us; and that this very evening the name of Christ will be heard in Cæsarea."

The Prince of Taranto obeyed; and loading the Mahometans with irons, took the road towards Ptolemaïs.

Meanwhile Malek Adhel, from the walls of Cæsarea, perceived the standard of the Cross floating on the breeze, beheld his brother's army in full retreat; and forthwith the voice of country and of kindred called to him with accents that would not be denied.

With rapid step he went out of the city, and pushing his way through the broken ranks, reached the

spot where Saladin stood, endeavoring with threats, entreaties, and example to rally his panic-stricken army.

"Saladin," said Malek Adhel, "until our mutual enemy yonder is conquered, we must be allies; afterwards deal with me as you will."

Without awaiting his brother's reply, he penetrated among the thinned ranks, rallying the soldiers; wherever he appeared fresh courage seemed to reanimate the troops and restrain their flying footsteps. Success seemed to follow in his wake; the fortunes of war were already changing in favor of the Mussulmans.

Surprised and touched despite all foregone conclusions, Saladin followed his brother's movements with intense interest; questioning within himself whether, indeed, Malek Adhel was the traitor he had been led to believe, or whether, as he had ever before considered him, he was his truest friend and the firmest support of his throne.

Thus absorbed in thought — rejoicing in even the faint hope of his brother's loyalty to which his sudden action had given rise, Saladin for a moment became oblivious to his surroundings.

Meanwhile the right wing of the Christian army had been carried by Malek Adhel. While he followed its retreating columns in hot pursuit, the left took advantage of the diversion to throw itself upon that portion of the Mussulman army remaining with the sultan.

By the black and yellow plumes surmounting his helmet, Richard recognized Saladin. He rushed upon him shouting:

"Hither, Christians, Saladin is ours!"

Thus surprised, the sultan for a moment was taken at a disadvantage. But Saladin was not to be unnerved by the sight of danger.

Ere Richard, calling upon him to surrender, had seized the bridle of his charger, he had dealt him a blow which severed in twain the buckler of the English king. Richard cast away the pieces and, with a second and more effectual effort, catching the reins of Saladin's horse, he presented his sword, saying:

"Resistance is vain, Sultan; you are the prisoner of Richard of England. Surrender!"

"I surrender not even my dead body," answered Saladin defiantly; "my brother would rescue it from your hands."

"Rely not too greatly upon that," laughed Richard; "Malek Adhel is for us."

"We shall see!" cried Saladin, now fully reassured on the score of his brother's fealty, and raising to his lips a small silver whistle which hung from his neck, he sounded a long, full, peculiar note — a signal of need, long since agreed upon between the brothers.

In the hottest of the fight Malek Adhel distinguished his brother's appeal. Forcing his way through the dense mass of living and dead, he reached Saladin. Thus supported, the sultan no longer thought of standing on the defensive, but turned fiercely upon his aggressor. Richard saw the peril of his situation, but he viewed it as a means of covering himself with fresh laurels — whether they should wreathe his kingly brow,

or rest upon his bier, he paused not to consider,—scarcely even cared.

At this moment, a sudden movement of the combatants separated the two brothers; but Malek Adhel relentlessly pursued the audacious warrior who had threatened Saladin's life.

Richard finding he was thus followed, disengaged himself from the fugitives who sought to save him with themselves, and turned back to meet the challenge of the Saracen prince.

A terrible contest ensued; the armor of both was stained with blood. In mutual astonishment at such powers of resistance, each discovered in the other an opponent worthy of his prowess, and redoubled his efforts.

Richard's horse receiving a blow intended for his master, finally fell beneath him; the intrepid king disengaging himself, continued the fight on foot. Malek Adhel, watching his opportunity, dealt him so powerful a blow with his sword, that the king's helmet was snapped from its fastenings, and rolled to the ground. The shock for a moment left Richard at the mercy of his adversary; and yet the instantaneous death he anticipated was not dealt him. Malek Adhel had traced upon the bronzed and bearded countenance of the Crusader a something that reminded him of his beloved: his sword dropped to his side; his arm was powerless to wield it.

"What name do you bear, brave knight?" he asked; "from your features, your valor, I suspect you to be one who should be near and dear to me."

"I am your enemy," replied Richard angrily; "your implacable enemy. I had overcome your brother; you snatched my triumph from my hands. You conquered me, and you spared my life. No benefits can possibly wipe out the remembrance of such offences."

"Well, proud Richard," said Malek Adhel, with feeling, "if you deem it your duty to bear me ill-will because of my fidelity to my country, I must endure, as best I may, the weight of your displeasure; nevertheless I shall not cease to honor in you the greatest king of the Christian world, nor to love in you the brother of the illustrious lady to whom I have devoted my life."

He suddenly ceased speaking, for he perceived a party of Mahometans coming towards them. Springing from his horse he offered it to Richard.

"Fly, Richard of England," he said hurriedly; "for the sake of your queen, of your sister, accept the chances of war. Against such numbers as you see before you, all your valor would not prevent you from losing your life without the slightest advantage to your cause."

This latter suggestion decided the king. His presence was necessary to reorganize his defeated army and conduct it in safety to Ptolemaïs. Duty gained the ascendency over soldierly pride. He accepted, with forced courtesy, the offer of Malek Adhel, and putting spurs to the horse, sped rapidly away beyond reach of pursuit; tears of rage welling up from his burning eyes, his hatred increased tenfold by the mortification of flight.

And now the evening of that fearful day has come. The clash of arms no longer mingles with the frantic neighing of horses, the fierce shouts of men. Along the hillside and over the valley, lie the bodies of the dead, their shining armor gleaming in the soft light of the setting sun; here and there are the broken "lilies of France," the "dragon of St. George," or the torn and dismantled standard of the confederated Christians, its red cross scarcely distinguishable for the blood with which — like the precious ointment of eld — it has been anointed.

The evening has come, and Malek Adhel, less elated by his victory, than grieved at the thought of the new barrier this day's work has placed between himself and his beloved, presents himself before his brother.

Calling together the chief officers of the troops who had assisted him in the revolt of Cairo, and of those who had deserted Metchoub to follow him, he thus addressed them:

"Will you, upon the sacred Koran, swear to obey the wish I am about to announce?"

"We swear!" they said.

"Follow my example, then," he said, "and at the feet of your sultan submit to whatever penalty he shall see fit to inflict upon us. Saladin," he added, kneeling before the sultan, and presenting his cimeter, point downward, "my life is now at your disposal; quench your just indignation in my blood; but if the actions of this day have earned me the privilege of asking a favor of you, grant me one last favor: spare these brave war-

riors; only in my defence have they failed in their loyalty to you; even that temptation will now cease to exist . . ."

The haughty sultan was moved to tears; a great joy overwhelmed him; the voice of Nature spoke within him; and forgetting the pride of his rank, the reserve of his habitual bearing, he opened wide his arms to the brother he had deemed forever lost to him. Malek Adhel threw himself into that loving embrace.

"Ah, Saladin," he cried, with affectionate reproach, "could you, indeed, believe the friend of your youth, the brother of your heart, capable of treachery towards you?"

"Should my eyes now behold it, I should not believe," said Saladin, his deep voice trembling with emotion. "Oh, Malek Adhel, if you have wronged me, I forgive, even as I pray your forgiveness for the revenge I would have exacted in return."

The two brothers, now equally impatient to be left to themselves, retired together to the privacy of the sultan's tent, where mutual explanations followed.

Saladin heard his brother's recital of the events which had transpired in Damietta; perceiving, at last, that the substitution of the Queen of England for the princess, had been the result of strategy on their part, and not of wilful defiance of his authority, on that of the prince. But when he was informed that a slave had been dispatched on the instant to acquaint him with the facts, a new light seemed to break upon his bewildered senses.

"Your message never reached me," he cried; "it

was your extraordinary silence which seemed to confirm Metchoub's accusations, otherwise, never would I have lent ear to them!"

Then, indeed, Malek Adhel fully comprehended his brother's wrath against him, and marvelled at a magnanimity which had pardoned, while believing in such extent of guilt.

At the sultan's request, the prince continued his story. He told him of the perils of the desert from which he had rescued the Princess of England; and admitted, with an honest candor, that the tears and entreaties of his beloved had prevailed with him, in those moments which he had deemed his last, to deny the faith of his fathers.

"But," he added, "if the influence of this angelic maiden has succeeded in shaking my religious belief, I swear to you that it shall not weaken my devotion to my country, nor my fidelity to yourself. I admit that love possesses a wondrous power over my heart; but you have seen to-day that it cannot stay my arm at the call of honor."

"I have heard you," said the sultan, as his brother ceased speaking, "and I have found you in no wise guilty. If the Queen of England was restored to her husband, I can charge the error only to the generosity — since you will so regard it — of the Princess Matilda. In sending her also away, at a later day, you spared me an act of cruelty which would have tarnished my glory forever. Defending yourself against Metchoub, you preserved what is dearer to me than my empire

itself — the life of my truest friend. It would have been sweet to forgive, Malek Adhel — but I have nothing to pardon. Nay, at the very hour when I had just ordered you to an ignominious death, you saved my army and my life! I know of but one means whereby I can cancel the debt. Accept the throne of Jerusalem; share it with the Princess of England; let her bring you Ptolemaïs as dowry; and may the Crusaders, content to behold a queen of their blood, and of their religion, seated upon the throne of Jerusalem, return to Europe and leave us in peace. As for yourself, always remain faithful to Allah and his holy prophet, and united in heart, in opinions, and in glory, with your brother, we shall serve as an example before the world of the truth and justice of our religion."

"I have known so well the greatness of soul which distinguishes you, Saladin," replied his brother, "that I am less surprised than touched by this generous act. I accept your gift, that gratitude may add another bond to the ties of duty and affection which bind me to you."

The impatient prince desired to be himself the bearer of Saladin's propositions to the camp of the Crusaders; but the haughty sultan refused to allow his brother to descend from his high estate, by presenting himself as ambassador before the Christian sovereigns. He commanded, also, that he upon whom devolved this important mission, should repair to the camp of Ptolemaïs surrounded by a blaze of oriental pomp and luxury, that even though the accomplishment of his errand should thereby be somewhat retarded, the greatness of those

whom he represented, and the importance of their message should be fully attested.

CHAPTER VI.

WHILE the sultan ordered and supervised the preparations for an embassy whose magnificence of display he desired should be in accordance with the importance of the matters it involved, premature tidings of the capture of Cæsarea reached the Crusaders' camp.

The Princess of England was alone in her oratory, when the Prince of Taranto entered Ptolemaïs to the sound of clarion and trumpet, bringing in his wake a host of prisoners. Matilda listened to these signs of victory; she heard the joyous acclamations of those who had been left to guard the city, and her heart stood still with a great dread. Upon the tidings they should bring depended her fate — the happiness or sorrow of her young life. Had Malek Adhel fulfilled the anticipations to which her sanguine hopes had given birth? Her fears now returned in full force; the devoted affection of the prince; the vows he had made to her in the desert; the protection he had assured her in the very face of Saladin's cruel commands; all were for the moment forgotten; she recalled only the courage with which in his hour of imminent peril, he had found strength to repel the tempting inducements of the Crusader knights, as he had denied the potent pleadings of her tears and entreaties.

In her agitation of spirit she sought relief in prayer; but none came to her. Fain would she have gone forth to anticipate tidings which would perhaps reach her only too soon; but some restraining instinct impelled her to guard within the privacy of her heart and chamber the feelings, whether of joy or of grief, which those tidings must elicit.

Presently a familiar footstep echoed along the corridor; nearer and still nearer it came. It was the Archbishop of Tyre, she knew, who was bringing her the news she so longed, yet so dreaded, to hear. His voice was without, asking admittance, but she could not answer him. Rising, she parted the curtains with trembling hand, her downcast eyes shunning his gaze, not daring yet to read upon his venerable face the sentence which must surely be imprinted there.

"Rejoice, my daughter," exclaimed William; "the Christians are victorious!"

The incoming sounds of triumph had already announced the fact; yet there was something in the archbishop's tones which inspired her with a sense of comfort; she dared now to lift to his face eyes fraught with anxious inquiry.

"Your brother has vanquished the Infidels," he replied; "at this moment Cæsarea is ours."

The young girl was still silent. The archbishop had not yet informed her under which flag Malek Adhel had fought; and her lips refused to utter a name through which all her love, her anxiety, her hopes, must escape her control. But her candid face revealed them, and

while he blamed her weakness, the old man would not refuse her what gladness his words might confer.

My child," he said kindly, "an Omnipotent God has softened the heart of Malek Adhel. For this and the coincident victory, the capture of Cæsarea, return your most fervent thanks."

A quick joy flashed across the young girl's face. The archbishop continued:

"When the Prince of Taranto left Cæsarea, Saladin's army still separated those of Richard and Malek Adhel; but our forces, victorious at all points, were preparing to cut their way through and unite with Malek Adhel's. There seemed to be little or no doubt that with this conjunction accomplished, Saladin's army could easily be cut to pieces, and the standard of the Cross raised above the walls of Cæsarea."

"Can this be true," cried the princess: "has love so wrought upon him as to induce Malek Adhel to contend against his brother?"

"My daughter," responded the archbishop with some severity of tone, "beware how you appropriate to yourself the things which are God's; human passions work not such marvels; Malek Adhel's miraculous conversion is due to Divine interposition alone. But of this, more anon. Go now to the queen, my child; she awaits and desires your presence. You will find the Prince of Taranto with her. He will satisfy you upon all minor details, and anticipate questions your natural timidity would hesitate to ask."

The Prince of Taranto bowed respectfully before the

beautiful princess as she entered; and Berengaria, saluting her cheek with a loving kiss, exclaimed in tones of joyous gratulation:

"'Tis to you, fair sister, we owe a victory forevermore famous in the annals of Christianity. Yielding to the influence of his love for you, Malek Adhel embraces our faith and joins arms with us; the glad tidings are already bruited throughout the camp, and to you is attributed the glory of his conversion; your name and that of Malek Adhel are united in the voice of a grateful people; one would think they could never more be separated."

"With the assistance of Malek Adhel," added the Prince of Taranto, "the Crusaders will march from one conquest to another; that of the entire East will not seem too great for their ambition. But if they aspire to so much, it will be with the sole view of offering it to the illustrious sister of Richard. With the hero whom you have given us you will ascend the throne of Saladin; from that exalted position you will shed down upon this benighted country that sacred fire with which the Eternal has filled your heart."

"So high a destiny," replied the princess meekly, "is far beyond my hopes."

"What destiny, what hopes, can be beyond what your exalted virtues, your marvellous beauty, give you the right to anticipate?" exclaimed the Prince of Taranto warmly; "Saladin himself, could he but behold you, would offer you his throne, would worship the God who created you!"

Such flattering speech, although consonant with the customs of the times, wounded the modesty of the young princess; the serious dignity of her mien warned the courtier that he had gone too far; and with some confusion he held his peace.

It was only at the queen's request that he continued his recital in order to inform Matilda how the situation of Malek Adhel before Cæsarea, and the encounter of his troops with those of Saladin, had given foundation to the Christians' hopes that he would consent to join their cause. And as she listened, the innocent heart of the young girl was filled with anticipations in which hitherto it had never dared to indulge.

The day following, the levee of the Queen of England was larger than usual. Besides the usual number of knights and gallants—who, when unoccupied by the sterner duties of war, fluttered, moth-like around the shining lights of beauty and rank—appeared the Kings of Jerusalem and of Antioch, the Counts of Tripoli and of Jaffa, and other warriors of renown, who, impatient for laurels from which they were withheld, remained in charge of the camp.

Standing nearest the queen, with whom he had been conversing, was the Prince of Taranto, upon whom centered the attention of the hour; the tidings of which he had been the fortunate bearer being of course a topic of all-absorbing interest to those present.

Gradually, however, conversation became more general, though still bearing more or less directly upon the subject of their recent victory.

The part which Malek Adhel was supposed to have taken in the contest was discussed in all its various aspects, together with the probable effect which his conversion would have upon his suit for the hand of the Princess of England. A majority of those who were prevented by their years or matrimonial engagements from entering the lists for Matilda's hand, favored an alliance which would afford such advantages to the cause of Christianity; those knights, on the other hand, who had laid their hearts at the feet of the beautiful princess, could not concede their own ambitious claims to those of the Saracen prince. Lusignan, especially, betrayed more plainly than was wise, the bitter jealousy which rankled within him.

"Whatever may have been the decision of Malek Adhel," he said, vehemently; "whether he has remained faithful to his country and his sovereign, or betrayed them by upholding our cause, he is equally unworthy of the prize to which he presumes to aspire. I am quite sure, Your Highness," he added, addressing the princess, "that pride of birth, as well as the innate purity of your mind, will forbid your acceptance of one whose belief is detestable before God, and whose very conversion would be at the cost of honor."

Matilda's blue eyes flashed upon him a haughty displeasure, while Berengaria would have openly chidden his bold speech. But the archbishop with a deferential gesture to the queen, answered for her.

"What impious words are these, Sire? What! you would presume to regard as a traitor him whom God

would deign to enlighten, and who, abjuring the false prophet, would receive the regenerating waters of baptism . . . "

"I beg your pardon, holy Father," interrupted Lusignan rudely, "but the question is one of honor and not of religion; and on this point, permit me to say, I consider myself the better judge. The rules of Chivalry do not always conform to those of the Church, and not infrequently what those of the one authorize, those of the other reprove."

"Montmorency, the knight who of all others was perhaps best informed upon the sacred duties of chivalry," interposed Matilda warmly, "differed from Your Majesty. Had Malek Adhel been a Christian, Montmorency would have held him in higher esteem than all the kings of this world; dying, he prayed for his conversion, and had that conversion been fraught with wrong, his noble soul would never have asked it of God."

"I accept no one's opinions as a rule for my own," replied the King of Jerusalem arrogantly; "still less would the last thoughts of a dying man have weight with me. It may be that when this world is passing away from us, and the great change is at hand, our ideas and feelings change also, but rest assured, Princess, were Montmorency still among us, his judgment would coincide with mine, and in beholding Malek Adhel fighting on the side of the Christians, he would see in him only a traitor who had tarnished his fame and dishonored his arms by turning them against his country and his legitimate sovereign. Montmorency's

voice, like mine, would declare him before all the world a coward and a traitor, and my sword, like his, will know how to uphold my words."

Berengaria indignant at the insulting reflections cast upon one whom her grateful heart loved to honor, answered him with a bitterness of speech quite foreign to her gentle nature.

"However formidable, Sire," she said, "may be your vaunted steel, I doubt whether he, so justly styled the 'thunderbolt of the East,' would quail before it!"

Lusignan turned white with anger, but restraining himself with an effort, he addressed himself to Matilda, in indirect reply to the queen's taunt.

"I am amazed, I confess," he said, "to hear the Queen of England profess sentiments so directly opposed to those of her illustrious lord, but I should be still more so, did they meet the approval of Your Highness."

"Sire," replied the young girl coldly, "if I have always prided myself upon entertaining the same views as the queen, my sister, I shall certainly not disagree with her now when she openly avows her admiration for the hero who has conquered your kingdom, and who will perhaps return it to you."

Ere Lusignan could retort, if, indeed, rage had not denied him utterance, unwonted sounds of distress resounded throughout the camp, and almost simultaneously the door was thrown open, and Richard appeared in full armor and covered with dust. His mien was gloomy and fierce, and he made no response even to

the queen's joyous welcome. The eyes of the young princess anxiously sought the form of him whom she had expected to behold at her brother's side, while the archbishop, constituting himself spokesman for the group of astonished warriors present, ventured to question the wounded lion of England upon a return which did not seem to confirm previous auspicious tidings.

"I have been vanquished," replied Richard fiercely, and vowing in his soul renewed hatred to him to whom the avowal was due.

"What!" exclaimed the Prince of Taranto; "then Your Majesty was repulsed ere being able to form a junction with Malek Adhel?"

"Never mention that name again in my hearing," cried Richard roughly; "'tis he to whom we owe our defeat — our disappointment. I had already carried the day. Saladin's army, completely routed and cut to pieces, was flying in wild confusion from the battlefield; the ground was strewn with their corpses, and the number of our prisoners as you know was immense; the sultan himself was already my prisoner, and the possession of Jerusalem was but the question of a few days' time, when suddenly, like some ill-omened meteor, Malek Adhel appeared upon the scene. Before him confusion was supplanted by order and a new-born courage; the Infidel troops rallied and re-formed; the Christians were conquered; Saladin was snatched from my very hand; and — O insufferable shame — for the first time in his life, Richard took to flight! How shall I bear the burthen of this mortification? And

yet, through the humiliating magnanimity of him to whom I owe it, I have lost the right to close in death the eyes which have witnessed my ignominious retreat!"

"And do you hold of such small account the brother-in-arms who would deem it a privilege to devote his life to the defence of your honor?" cried Lusignan, with a fierce joy. "Are you not surrounded by loyal friends who will gladly swear with me to lay down their arms only when death shall have relieved this earth of the sole man who can dare to boast of having compelled Richard of England to fly?"

These crafty words added fuel to the fire of Richard's wrath, and smothered the generous emotions of his better nature. He seized Guy de Lusignan's hand, and wrung it with a fierce fervor that caused the other to wince with pain.

"Brave friend, I entrust my honor — the honor of Richard of England to your hands, and I promise the hand of my sister to the conqueror of Malek Adhel."

Instantly, those among the assembled kings and knights who aspired to the princess' hand, gathered about the king, and raising aloft the points of their swords, with one accord swore to compass the death of Malek Adhel.

At sight of the glittering steel vowed to the destruction of a life so inestimably dear to her, a deathly pallor overspread the countenance of the young girl; the same haughty spirit which animated her dauntless brother, flashed in her eyes; she essayed to speak, to

defy Richard before them all, and openly refuse the price of blood he had promised them, but her rigid lips refused their service, the fearful scene grew more and more confused before her dizzy gaze, and she fell fainting into the outstretched arms of the weeping queen.

Richard started, but did not approach his sister. With a gesture he said to the queen: "Call your tire-women, Madam, that they may take this young girl away. Father," he continued, addressing the archbishop, "I pray you follow her; when she is in condition to listen to you, tell her that duty is dearer than life, and that her first duty is to obey me; that she must know full well that my honor will not permit her to be indifferent to her own."

Ere following the ladies William respectfully bowed before the king, and replied: "I know the Princess of England, Sire; I assure your Majesty that the conduct of the Princess Matilda will always do honor to her race."

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN the heart is suddenly stricken with a great misfortune, it becomes at first numb and insensible, it feels no pain, it is scarcely conscious of life. But presently, like an overwhelming torrent, suffering comes coursing back through its throbbing arteries, suffering so exquisite that death alone seems capable of affording relief.

Such was the condition of the unfortunate princess: the repose of the grave would have been her prayer, but for that fearful oath which must remain after her. She must live, must live to ward from her lover's breast the blows which threatened it, or else to lessen for him the horrors of death by brightening with her presence its gathering shadows.

"Let me go to them," she implored, "let me present myself before Richard and his cruel friends, and on my knees plead with them to retract their fearful oath. I will remind my brother of the benefits he has forgotten: I will tell him of the generous favors bestowed upon his queen, of the life for which he himself is indebted. Aye," she added, rising, her beautiful eyes kindling with feverish excitement, "I will rehearse to them all their vaunted rules of chivalry! I a weak woman, will teach them the spirit of equity and magnanimity which distinguishes the true knight from the false."

"My child," said the archbishop, taking her hands in his own and drawing her gently down to the seat beside him, "the hour when it would be wise for you to speak has not yet come. In your present frame of mind you would probably say what had best be left unsaid; Richard is maddened by the mortification his martial pride has so lately received; your very anxiety for his adversary would now be deemed a fresh excuse for additional ill-will towards him. Be patient, my child, learn to wait. No pressing danger threatens Malek Adhel's life. Safe now within the walls of Cæsarea, his enemies cannot reach him, nor

will they attempt it until our army is ready to lay siege to that city, and then . . . "

"And then . . . . ?" she said, looking up with pained, questioning eyes, as he hesitated.

"*Until then*, my child, you must wait and pray," he added with quiet decision. "Question not God's decrees; yet ask with faith and a pure heart, that He may avert the ills that man proposes. Pray, my child, for the safety, but more especially for the conversion of him who has given life and liberty to you and yours, but let the gratitude which God approves, and not a love which religion now forbids, ascend with your prayers to the Almighty's throne."

"Father," she answered sadly, "the hour we learn to fear for the object loved, is that in which we love the most. I cannot if I would, conceal from God that Malek Adhel is dearer to me than all else on earth; but if the power to cast him out of my heart is no longer mine, this vow, at least, I can renew unto Him: that Malek Adhel shall never claim me as his bride while he remains an Infidel. But by another vow quite as solemn, I have sworn to be the bride of no other. Oh, my Father, shelter me from the power of those who would sacrifice me, let me return to the peaceful shades of my cloister!"

"You will never obtain Richard's permission to do so, my poor child," interposed Berengaria compassionately. "His wishes and his promise both bind him to give you in marriage to Lusignan, and he will compel you to obey."

"He will compel me!" exclaimed the princess proudly: "and wherein consists his right to do so? What power can he bring to bear upon me?"

"His commands will doubtless suffice," replied the queen. "Who would think of resisting Richard?"

"It would be far more difficult for me to obey in this case," the young girl answered.

"My child," said the archbishop, "it requires great courage to oppose the will of kings."

"But far less than to renounce one beloved," she answered wearily.

Then turning aside she bowed her face upon her hand, and remained for several moments absorbed in profound and painful thought. William and Berengaria respecting her grief, kept silence.

Presently a messenger came to announce that Richard desired the presence of the queen.

Aroused from her revery Matilda raised her head. Her countenance had resumed its wonted serenity; only the eyes and the firmer lines about the tender mouth suggested a power of resistance hitherto scarcely suspected in her. She rose, laying her hand upon Berengaria's.

"Father," she said, "I am calm, quite calm now; let me accompany my sister to Richard's presence. I will say but one word to him. It is this: he has promised my hand to him who shall take the life of Malek Adhel; but the bride of God cannot be the bride of man, my cloistered vow will release him from the oath he has sworn to those cruel knights, and they

will not seek the life of him who is no longer their rival."

"Be guided by me, Matilda," the old man answered; "form no sudden resolutions, do not act rashly. Nothing can be lost by a wise delay, and much may be gained. I will speak with the king, nay, more, I will see Malek Adhel himself . . . "

"You, Father!"

"My child, yes; duty dictates the step. If it be true that some small germs of the true faith have fallen into the heart of the prince, God bids me foster and develop them. Malek Adhel's conduct before Cæsarea grieves but does not discourage me. Alas, we are no longer in the blessed age of sudden and miraculous conversions, and only through patience and perseverance can we accomplish them. The voice of God is no longer heard upon the earth through the miracles in which he announced His presence, and only argument is left to the voice of man. My child, I shall repair immediately to Cæsarea, and will converse with the Saracen prince."

"Father, your impulse of charity has misled your wonted wisdom," interposed the queen; "the Infidels will imprison you, they will dare more, perhaps . . . "

"They will dare nothing," the old man replied, in the full assurance of faith. "Whosoever labors for God, will be protected by God, and should He permit my blood to be shed for His sake, I should but share the fate of Him who died for me. Could a more glorious death await me!"

"Oh, man of God," cried the young girl, inspired by his enthusiasm, "guide, direct me aright, I am so weak and you are strong; command, I am ready to obey."

"Poor child," he said compassionately, "at present I ask of you only this: take no important step in the matter in question until my return, and endeavor meanwhile to reconcile yourself to whatever your Heavenly Father may decree."

After laying his venerable hands in silent benediction upon the bowed head of the young girl he went out, followed by the queen.

"Well," cried Richard, as the archbishop entered his room, "have you enjoined obedience upon my sister? Is she now submissive to my wishes?"

"Sire," replied William gravely; "I have forbidden her to form or declare any decision whatever until my return."

"And whither would you go?"

"Where Heaven sends me, Sire; I cannot enter into explanations at present, and as the queen is informed of my projected journey, I venture to ask that Your Majesty will respect the silence I now impose upon her."

At sunset the worthy prelate, laying aside the symbols of his high ecclesiastical rank, and assuming the humble garb of a simple priest, with only a pilgrim's staff for arms, rosary and bible for shield, and a faith which raised him far above all personal fear, set forth on his way to Cæsarea.

CHAPTER VIII.

FREQUENTLY, when shadow and coolness succeeded the burning heat of the day, the princess, accompanied by her women, repaired to the sea-shore to breathe the balmy exhalations borne on the evening breeze. Oftener, still, her steps were directed towards the tomb of Montmorency. In this sacred spot her sorrow was always tinged with a tender reverence, and copious tears solaced her overburdened heart. Sometimes from the summit of the hill where the young knight reposed, she would look out upon the sea, her thoughts would traverse its boundless space and return to the secluded cloister whose serene peace she had exchanged for the trials and temptations of the outer world. Yet she did not regret the change. There her days, like pure pearls, slipped from her grasp scarce noted; here she had learned their value. Sorrow develops and exercises within us qualities of the heart and faculties of the intellect, which the repose of happiness soothes to inglorious inaction. Thus musing, she pondered well within her mind whether a life which has been tried and not found wanting, were not a nobler offering to God, than one whose ignorance of evil constitutes its principal virtue; and she resolved more firmly than ever, that whatever fate awaited her, her own should be held meet for His approval.

Since the departure of the archbishop, Matilda had

evaded all opportunities of being alone with her brother; nor did Richard seem particularly desirous of her society. His martial tastes appeared to absorb all other aspirations; and while he awaited the moment when it would be deemed advisable to begin the siege of Cæsarea, he exercised his prowess by making almost daily raids upon the Saracen outposts, whence he usually returned laden with spoils.

Lusignan never left his side on these incursions; braving dangers in common, the same laurels entwined the close bonds of their friendship. Proud of their triumphs, intoxicated with their glory, they looked forward with assurance to the day when a broader field would open to them more brilliant opportunities for martial renown; and thus, with one heart, one will, they urged the hastening of preparations for the siege of Cæsarea. Their enthusiasm animated all who came within its influence; the name of Malek Adhel ceased to inspire terror among the Crusaders as formerly, and those of Richard and Lusignan became the synonyms of victory.

The evening preceding the day set for the inauguration of the new campaign, Matilda had sought the queen to inquire whether she had yet received tidings of the archbishop. But disappointment still awaited her; Berengaria had heard nothing.

The two poor women wept together as they talked of this ominous silence of him upon whom alone their hopes now centered; or of the battles which would begin on the morrow. Together they pictured to themselves the dreaded scene of Richard struggling in mortal

strife with Malek Adhel; together they prayed, yet not with one accord, for while each could but yearn for the safety of him who was most dear, still neither could desire the sacrifice of him upon whom gratitude or sisterly affection centered.

While they alternately wept and tried to pray, the clash of arms and the sound of martial music smote the air, and presently Richard, his fine eyes beaming with fierce joy, broke in upon their solitude.

"What, in tears!" he exclaimed reproachfully. "Weeping when victory crowns our arms! This day hosts of Saracens have bitten the dust. Lusignan has surpassed himself in gallant deeds. Accompanied by a small detachment of men, we were wandering along the outskirts of the little wood which girdles the base of Mount Carmel, in search of such prey as best befits the hunters of men. Fortune favored us beyond our most sanguine expectations. A convoy of arms and provisions, under a guard of three thousand Saracens, was wending its way from Jerusalem towards Cæsarea. Without looking behind us to see whether our men were closely following in our tracks, Lusignan and I, with one accord, put spur to our horses and fell upon the caravan. Astonished at our audacity, the Infidels for a moment seemed stupefied; then perceiving our men issuing at full gallop from the shelter of the wood, they became panic-stricken, believing themselves caught in an ambuscade, and took to flight, leaving behind them a rich booty. We followed in hot pursuit, and desisted only after we had given ample

foundation to their craven fears. Lusignan is engaged at this moment in disposing of our abundant spoils; with whetted appetites my blood-hounds of battle cry for more, and impatiently await the morrow's sun to light us on our way to more glorious victories. Ere long the Infidel's blood shall wash from my fame the one stain which rests upon it . . ."

"Oh, Richard," cried the unhappy princess, throwing herself upon her knees before him, "among all your noble virtues, is there no place for gratitude?"

"Young maiden," her brother answered with some severity, "do you forget that since the day Malek Adhel shed the blood of Christians before Cæsarea, all hopes of his conversion are at an end, and with them whatever pretensions he might have advanced to your affections?"

"Ah, Sire," she cried, with ready wit, "'tis from that day I date my gratitude to him for my brother's life! But for him, I should not now plead with you for the same boon he granted to yourself!"

Her tender, imploring accents, softened Richard's stern heart. He was about to reply, to give her some kinder assurance, perhaps, when Lusignan, accompanied by several of the bravest of the Crusader knights, requested admittance, excusing himself to the queen for his intrusion, on the ground that the warriors without were impatient to do honor to the gallant lion of England.

Overcome by anxiety and grief, the princess retired to her chamber and threw herself upon her bed. The hours of the night dragged slowly on, and still she kept

her weary vigils, sleep denying its blessed nepenthe to torturing thought. Finally troubled slumbers came to her tired brain, but they brought no forgetfulness, and in fearful dreams she rehearsed past scenes, or anticipated others yet in store, perhaps more terrible still. Sometimes she beheld Malek Adhel struggling in the vise-like grip of her brother, whose handsome features seemed distorted into those of a demon. Again, she would see Richard's bleeding corpse dragged through the dust, and flung at her feet by her lover's hand. Once she seemed to gaze down — down — into abysmal depths of quenchless fire, and from amid the flames the white, tortured face of Malek Adhel was upturned to hers.

"Oh, faint heart," cried the agonized voice, "behold the result of your silence! Had you spoken in time; had you revealed to your brother the tie which bound us, the price he had promised for my blood would have been recalled. They slew me ere yet I had time to seek your God. I am lost forever — forever — forever . . ."

So vivid was the fearful vision, so clearly did these words of anguish seem to strike upon her startled ear, that the young girl trembling violently, sprung up in affright. But though now awake, the same dreadful scenes seemed still present before her excited fancy, not as dreams, indeed, but as premonitions of a horrible reality.

The thought decided her. She would not be accessory, through her silence, to the deed they contemplated!

She would not permit, by forbearing denial, that her hand should be promised to her lover's assassin! She would go to Richard, and on her knees humble herself before him, and reveal the secret of her love. If there was shame to her maiden modesty in the confession — in silence there was crime.

Hastily attiring herself, she went out into the grey dawn and repaired to the tent where, at this early hour, she knew she would find Richard preparing for departure.

The men on guard before the door, surprised at so early a visit, hesitated to admit the princess, informing her that the chief captains of the army were at that moment closeted with the king. But waving them aside, she scarcely heeded their excuses; and the soldiers, no longer daring to refuse ingress to the sister of their sovereign, allowed her to pass without further comment.

The next moment, pale and trembling with agitation, she had thrown herself at Richard's feet.

The King of Jerusalem and the Dukes of Bavaria and of Burgundy, who were with him, startled by this pale apparition, sprang forward to raise her, but she clung to her brother's knees.

"Sire," she cried, "hear me, I implore you! A horrible dream has thrice aroused me from my sleep! Malek Adhel has appeared before me, reproaching me with his death — his eternal perdition! You have promised my hand to his assassin; and I — I vow everlasting hatred to him who shall lay low that sacred head!"

"Matilda, what is this you dare to say to me . . . ?" interrupted Richard in angry astonishment.

She did not allow him to finish; but with her clasped hands uplifted, and her supplicating eyes seeking his own, she went on:

"I can keep silence no longer, Richard. With my secret I will ransom the life of him I love. Malek Adhel laid down his life to save my own in the desert. Abandoned to a fearful fate, we were about to die. In that supreme moment God was my sole guide and support. Malek Adhel promised to become a Christian. He received my vows in return. Calling God to witness, I promised him that I would have no other husband!"

Exhausted by the effort her avowal had cost her, the pale princess, with eager eyes awaited her brother's, verdict.

Dumb with anger and astonishment, Richard gazed at her for several moments; then he spoke:

"Is it from the lips of my sister — of the daughter of Henry, that I have heard so shameless an avowal! And I am asked to ratify these vile oaths, forsooth! — to ally the proud blood of my race with that of a base Tartar!"

"You mistake, Sire," his sister answered firmly; "your sister will never ask your consent to a union with Malek Adhel, the Mahometan. But my love, as well as my vow, forbid me to accept another in his place. Oh, Sire, now that you have heard my avowal, I call upon your sense of justice to bear me witness whether it is possible for me to allow you to promise my hand to the assassin of Malek Adhel!"

The king made no reply. He threw himself upon a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Lusignan drew nearer to the princess.

"You have wounded me to the heart," he said, his voice thick with suppressed feeling; "but if my grief gives you no concern, look upon the sorrow you have dealt your noble brother. All the sweet hopes which bound our friendship in such close intimacy have now faded ere fruition! And why? For a vain oath from which the pope would grant a willing release . . . !"

"You are right," cried Richard starting from his seat: "weakness prompted her vows; honor mine! If my sister's imprudence has not rendered her less dear to you, Lusignan; if you consent to forget . . ."

"How can you ask it, Sire?" interrupted Lusignan, throwing himself on one knee before the princess: "Should I ever become the possessor of so priceless a treasure, I shall remember only that to your generosity, and to her grace, am I indebted for my peerless bride."

Richard grasped his sister's hand to place it in Lusignan's. She repulsed him with a shudder.

"Only through obedience can you obtain my forgiveness," Richard said severely.

Intimidated by her brother's anger, the young girl's beseeching eyes turned toward the Duke of Burgundy.

Just as he was coming forward to speak in answer to her appeal, the Duke of Norfolk, captain of the king's guard, entered the room.

"Your Majesty will, I pray, forgive an intrusion which only an announcement of importance could war-

rant," he said, saluting the King of England: "the advance-guard, led by Adam de Turenne, had already set forth, when they perceived in the distance an approaching troop preceded by the banner of the Crescent. A herald, separating from his party, came forward alone, and announced that a brilliant embassy was advancing, charged with propositions of peace from Saladin. It is to yourself, Sire, the mission is chiefly addressed, and I came to receive your orders."

In his surprise Richard turned intuitively to his sister; her cheek was crimsoned with conscious blushes, her eyes sought the ground; then addressing the King of Jerusalem and the Duke of Burgundy, he remarked upon the possible motive of this embassy from the Sultan Saladin.

"Whatever advantages he may offer us, Sire," cried Lusignan, enraged at this fresh obstacle to his hopes, "I, for one, reject them if he demands in return, the hand of the Princess Matilda for his brother."

"But Your Majesty, will, I beg, remember that the will of the King of Jerusalem is not our law," retorted the Duke of Burgundy haughtily; "and that the interests of our religion must be consulted before those of his affections; in a word, that the council of the confederate princes alone possesses the right to entertain and reply to the propositions of Saladin."

The impetuous King of Jerusalem was on the point of returning some offensive answer, and Richard was indignantly asserting his sole right to dispose of his sister's hand, when the Duke of Bavaria interposed.

"What," he said; "we are not yet acquainted with the propositions which Saladin desires to make us, and already discord breaks out among us! Let us wait, at least, until better informed on the subject; and resolve that the interests of our cause shall alone influence our decision."

The wise counsels of the Duke of Bavaria prevailed. Richard evidently acquiesced in the justice of his remarks, and Lusignan, perceiving that insistence would at present militate against his cause, offered no further opposition.

The King of England then bade the Duke of Norfolk convoke a council of the princes and chiefs of the army to assemble within an hour for the reception of Saladin's embassy, and offering his arm to his sister, led her in silence from the tent.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT words could express the sudden revulsion of feeling in the heart of the young princess? From the uttermost depths of despair had suddenly sprung hopes more tangible, more bright, than even her most sanguine dreams had ever pictured. For what could be the object of this splendid embassy from Saladin, save that which Lusignan's fears had instinctively suggested? And knowing so well her resolve to wed him only on condition of his embracing her faith, would

Malek Adhel be likely to subject himself to a certain denial?

In the midst of these happy, hopeful dreams, the princess longed for the presence of the archbishop, desiring the sanction of his approval of her happiness, and anxious to obtain his forgiveness for having broken the pledge she had given at the moment of his departure.

While thus absorbed in her thoughts, Hermione, Countess of Leicester, sought her, bringing information that among the people of the ambassador's suite, she had recognized one of Malek Adhel's most faithful followers.

The princess eagerly inquired whether she had spoken with him.

"I have not, Your Highness," replied the countess; "the king, your brother, has forbidden all communication between the Christians and the ambassador's suite until such time as the council may have decided upon the propositions of Saladin."

Hermione said no more; not presuming to continue without further questions from the princess. But Matilda was silent. Anxious for some definite tidings of Malek Adhel, her sensitive delicacy refused to betray that anxiety to the sight of others, but her candid eyes, her attitude of attention, revealed something of this to the countess, who with ready wit availed herself of the implied permission, and continued:

"Notwithstanding the sedulous care with which the sultan's propósitions have been guarded, some portion of their import has penetrated to our people. 'Tis said

the envoy Mohammed is the bearer of a request for Your Highness' hand for the brother of the sultan, the Prince Malek Adhel. Two hours since, he was introduced before the council, but nothing has as yet transpired."

The princess turned her face away; she felt it was too radiant with its happy secret for the scanning of another — even though that other was only her faithful friend.

But Hermione, ever watchful and discreet, had divined the princess' secret, and now perceived her need. Requesting permission to retire, she left Matilda to the solitude of her own happy thoughts.

As the hours sped by all unnoted, the restraint she had imposed upon her hopes — lest disappointment should deal them sudden doom — grew less and less within her control, and thoughts of Malek Adhel possessed her heart to the exclusion of all others. She recalled his noble qualities, his heroic acts, she saw before her his manly beauty of face and form; she loved him with all the intensity of a tenderness so long held in subjection to reason and religion. It seemed now as though, should he be denied eternal life with her, God Himself would not possess the power to render her happy.

The sound of approaching footsteps aroused her from her tender revery, and she hastened to efface all traces of emotion from her conscious face.

It was Berengaria who entered.

"Queen of Jerusalem, I salute you!" she cried,

radiant with gladness, as she touched her lips to her sister's cheek.

Matilda shuddering, drew herself away.

"Detestable title — and from your lips, Berengaria! Never! Not all the powers of earth shall compel me to share the throne of Lusignan!"

"Not even with Malek Adhel, to whom by actual possession it belongs, fair sister?" queried the queen, archly smiling.

The princess grew pale and trembled. Her dreams then, had not exceeded the limits of possibility; nay, even now, happiness — such happiness as once she had deemed only Heaven could offer — was awaiting her!

The queen drew her arm tenderly about her. "There is nothing impossible to love, Matilda," she said; "like faith it endows its possessor with the gift of working miracles."

She placed her finger under the young girl's dimpled chin and smiling softly down upon her, drew her face upward to meet her own.

But Matilda was too troubled to respond. The vague mist-veil of a maiden's innocent dreams seemed suddenly to have been torn away and life to open before her with a reality whose mystic newness alarmed and agitated her.

Surprised at her silence, the queen exclaimed:

"What, Matilda, when Providence deigns to change the hearts of kings, and seemingly even turns the march of events from their allotted course in order to unite you

to him you love, you hesitate — you do not even bless Him for this unexpected happiness?"

"Sister, ere I dare to do so — ere I dare believe in that happiness — tell me first, has Malek Adhel become a Christian?"

"I am still uninformed upon that point," said the queen.

"Then, until no doubt rests there, speak to me no more of happiness, Berengaria."

"Do you not fear that this implied doubt of God's power will be accounted against you, Matilda?" asked the queen seriously. "Why strive thus against the hope and happiness which others so anxiously seek, and finding, endeavor to retain? Read this, and learn that upon you, perhaps, depends the fate of this vast empire — upon you the salvation of many human souls."

She placed a sheet of parchment in the princess' hand, bidding her read the propositions of Saladin to the Crusader chiefs.

"In the name of the one eternal God" the missive ran, "and of His holy prophet Mahomet whom He hath sent to reform His law, We, most Illustrious Sultan, Defender of the true Word, Ornament to the Faith, King of the Mussulmans, Servitor of the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina, We, Saladin, son of Ayoub, do hereby declare and proclaim unto those princes united by the law of Christ, that we have bestowed upon the very noble Prince Malek Adhel, our brother, the kingdom of Jerusalem, all Judea, and several important towns of Syria; but since all these valuable possessions

do not satisfy him unless shared by the Princess of England, we do now propose this alliance as the gage of a perpetual peace between the East and the West; we consent that a Christian queen should occupy the throne of Jerusalem; that by her presence and influence she may sustain and protect the followers of her faith, and cement a bond of fellowship between Mahometan and Christian. We permit her to reserve for the purposes of her religion, the temple of the Resurrection, to restore the monasteries now in ruins, and to grant free privilege to pilgrims to enter the holy city.

"We demand in return, that the Princess Matilda of England bring as dowry, our good city of Ptolemaïs, wrested from our forces by those of the Christians.

"We offer these terms in good faith, and, if accepted, will maintain an inviolable peace. But if our envoy returns to us with a refusal, we will forthwith proceed to meet you in open warfare and God will protect the right.

"Decide then whether you will have peace or war; with the royal gifts of our munificence in one hand and our trusty sword in the other, we await your response.

"By the will of God. Amen."

Matilda read the missive several times before returning it to the queen.

"Do you know what reply the council has returned to these propositions of the sultan?" she asked.

"They produced great commotion at first," answered the queen, "and violent altercation ensued. The majority pronounced favorably upon them, but Lusignan

rejected them with furious denunciation. Richard sustained him; the spirit of dissension was gaining upon the assembly; not one wise counsel was heard amid the general raising of angry voices. The absence of the Archbishop of Tyre was made painfully apparent. I have said that the more numerous party were in favor of accepting the sultan's terms; the most violent opposed them. In the midst of the general tumult, Lusignan was seen to rise and approach Richard. He conversed with him in a low voice for a few minutes, then requested to be heard by the other members of the council.

"'Princes,' he said, when silence was once more restored, 'I am asked to cede to Malek Adhel a kingdom, — nay more; I am to yield the lovely princess whose hand has already been promised me by her brother, the King of England. Yet, immense as are the sacrifices demanded of me, if religion requires them I am ready to obey, but of this I must be fully assured: let God's ministers decide the question. I propose that Saladin's demand be held in abeyance until such time as a council of bishops, presided over by the pope's legate, shall have pronounced its verdict. To its wisdom let us defer the question whether it would be to the advantage of Christianity to abandon Jerusalem to a Mussulman prince, and to give our sanction that a daughter of the blood royal of England should swear obedience and submission to an Infidel.'

"There was such an appearance of moderation in Lusignan's proposal that he won over the majority of

his opponents, and the motion proposed was carried without difficulty.

"It was therefore announced that the question being one more nearly concerning religion, the propositions of Saladin should be laid before the bishops, and that pending their decision, a truce should be requested with the Mussulmans. And you may rest assured, my sister," the queen added, "that since the matter rests with them, they will not hesitate to accept an alliance which would restore to the true faith a portion of its ancient power. Ah, shall not such light shine from a throne where reigns our pious Matilda, that the benighted Orient shall rejoice in a new and glorious day!"

"May Malek Adhel receive its blessings," said the young girl with moist eyes; "and my cup of happiness would be full to overflowing! But tell me, Berengaria, do you know whether this embassy is an effect of the archbishop's presence at Cæsarea? Were I but assured of this, I should no longer feel doubt or anxiety concerning the sentiments of Malek Adhel."

"They bring no tidings of William," answered the queen; "indeed, it seems he had not reached Cæsarea when the sultan's envoy left that city."

The princess made no reply, but the faint flush of expectation gradually faded from her cheek.

"On returning from the council," continued Berengaria, "my dear lord was thoughtful and silent. He did not vouchsafe a single word during the time the Duke of Burgundy entertained me with the foregoing recital, but when it was concluded, Richard came to

me, placed these despatches in my hand, and requested me to communicate their contents to you, adding that he would shortly converse with you on the subject himself."

"Oh! God," cried Matilda, "some mystery is surely concealed beneath this unwonted courtesy! Can it be possible that Lusignan has overcome my brother's natural candor and straightforwardness, and taught him to dissimulate! This council of the bishops, convoked by the artifice of the King of Jerusalem, fills me with anxiety; no good, it seems to me, can proceed from Lusignan's designing brain. Berengaria, do you think the council will venture to sit without the presence of William? Will they dare to decide without his assenting voice?"

"Lusignan insists that they shall not await the archbishop. He dreads the influence of an attraction, which, notwithstanding his piety, William evidently feels toward Malek Adhel."

"Heavenly Father," cried the princess; "when this shining light of our faith cannot repress an interest in Malek Adhel, is my weak heart so culpable in having been powerless to repulse him! . . . "

The words froze upon her lips, for looking up she beheld Richard standing in the doorway. He seemed grave and anxious, and paced the floor several moments in silent thought. Presently, however, he stopped before his sister.

"Matilda," he said, "when I left Europe and relinquished the reins of government at home, it was for

the sole purpose of wresting the holy sepulchre from the power of the Infidels and restoring it to the hands of Christians. In the isle of Cyprus I first knew Lusignan. I was touched by his misfortunes, I swore to restore his kingdom to him, and my oath was further strengthened by the intimacy of a close friendship and a fraternity of arms. What is it they propose to me to-day? To become a traitor to my oath, to desert my friend in his hour of trouble, to consent that he should be robbed of his rights, and a Mussulman invested with his spoils. This is not all; we must, forsooth, restore to the Infidels fair Ptolemaïs, a city won at the cost of so much precious blood and patient labor; more, they demand that my sister, a princess of the blood royal of the Plantagenets, should ally herself to a Saracen adventurer. Can I consider such propositions without offence to my pride, my honor! Shall it be said throughout Europe that Richard, the hope of Christendom, the terror of the Orient, has ignominiously succumbed to the first proposition of the Infidel sultan!"

He paused, oppressed with anger. The queen and princess kept silence. After awhile he continued:

"What the united voices of the entire army of Crusaders would have asked of me in vain, Lusignan has obtained. With unparalleled magnanimity he has waived his own rightful claims, and requested that an ecclesiastical council should decide a question our swords had better have set at rest. He has prevailed upon me to consent to the measure; if I have done so,

it is to permit my friend's heroism to shine forth the more conspicuously before the world. Matilda, so noble an example will not, I trust, be lost on you; it will teach you what deference is due to so great a sacrifice on the part of Lusignan and myself; it will inform you that if vows pronounced in the names of friendship and of honor may yield to more general interests, those which love has forced from weakness should succumb more readily; it will teach you, in short, wherein your duty lies, should the council of the bishops conclude to refuse the alliance proposed. You will remember that having the power to enforce obedience, I have refrained from using it; that I have held in abeyance a will little used to brook control. After so great an effort over myself, should you refuse to follow my example; should you, even for a moment, hesitate to recognize my authority and accept the choice I have made for you, your temerity will be equalled only by your ingratitude."

Richard ceased speaking, awaiting his sister's reply; but the princess remained silent. If she possessed sufficient courage to keep firm to her resolve to wed Malek Adhel or no other man, she was not rash enough to declare that resolution to the king, at least not at present.

Berengaria, perceiving Richard's increasing displeasure, hastened to break a silence which was becoming painful, and inquired whether the ecclesiastical council would be held without awaiting the return of the Archbishop of Tyre.

"You who are acquainted with his movements," he

answered, with bitter sarcasm, "could better inform us of the length of time his important mission will detain him; but the secrecy he has exacted of you on that point not permitting you to enlighten us, we have found it necessary to act on the venture, and have determined that should the archbishop not return within eight days, the council will meet without him."

He stopped short, intently regarding his sister, as though awaiting her reply, but she still kept silence.

"Your hopes are very quiet, Matilda," he said coldly; "perhaps, for the sake of your fair fame, it would have been better had your fears been likewise held under restraint this morning. You have committed a great imprudence in betrothing yourself to Malek Adhel, a greater one still in publicly avowing it; nevertheless, for the sake of the affection I bear you, and in consideration of your extreme youth, I will forgive you; but, fair sister, remember hereafter that in your exalted position the eyes of the world are upon you, and a second act of indiscretion on your part will not be forgotten or forgiven. This evening you will, I beg, be present at the queen's reception."

To this invitation, which was more a command than a request, his sister yielded acquiescence, and Richard left the room.

Preoccupied with anxious thoughts, the princess found herself compelled to listen to the various surmises and conjectures arising from the great event of the day, and to give ready answers in such a manner as to ward off any suspicion of her own sentiments, while offering

to the opposing side no pretext of repugnance on her part to the proposed alliance.

Among the brilliant assembly held by the queen some, filled with admiration for Malek Adhel and the beautiful princess, openly advocated the union in contemplation; others, with malicious curiosity, sought to discover Matilda's private sentiments towards her suitor. The women regarded her with envy; Richard with ill-concealed coldness; Berengaria with tender pity. The various knights who had sought her hand, with difficulty controlled the expression of their anxiety or indignation. The bishops, gravely silent, refused to be questioned concerning their opinion, and imposed upon their countenances the same reserve as upon their speech.

Lusignan, leaning upon the back of the princess' arm-chair, appeared to be absorbed in a profound melancholy, but in reality he was noting with infinite satisfaction that his apparent resignation, magnanimity, and grief, had produced their anticipated effect by creating an almost universal sympathy for him.

No man ever possessed less natural greatness of soul than Lusignan; but none knew better how useful its semblance could be on certain occasions, nor was this the first time that by feigning self-sacrifice, he had sought to obtain much by seeming to yield all.

He had observed that morning during the council of the princes, that a large majority was opposed to his interests, and in persistently rejecting Saladin's overtures he was alienating even those who seemed most

disposed to sympathize with himself. Richard alone would be powerless against the unanimous voice of the Crusader princes; artifice, then, was his last resource. By anticipating a sacrifice which was sure to be required of him, he would raise himself in the esteem of the Crusaders, entwine himself the more closely about Richard's affections, and perhaps, even succeed in winning a more kindly regard from Matilda. Besides, in suggesting an ecclesiastical council, Lusignan was aware that a further delay would be necessary, and delay meant opportunity for the exercise of his most efficient weapon — intrigue.

But a pure heart possesses an instinctive discernment between truth and its semblance, and however Lusignan's generous words or acts might surprise Matilda, they in no wise impressed her or softened her heart towards him, and even the profound dejection of his mien inspired her with a repugnance for which she reproached herself, but could not overcome.

"Ah, Your Highness," he was saying to her, "if Malek Adhel had asked of me only my throne, and I might yet hope that a love like mine could satisfy your ambition, how gladly would I yield him all my possessions — my rights!"

"Sire," she answered with chilling coldness, "how could Malek Adhel have asked of you Jerusalem and my hand, since Jerusalem is already his and my hand is my own?"

She rose as she spoke, and in order to rid herself of the importunities of a suitor for whom she entertained

such intense dislike, she joined the queen, who was conversing with the pope's legate.

Lusignan followed, and fearing that the princess might endeavor to enlist the venerable prelate in favor of Malek Adhel, he ventured to forestall her.

"Beware, your Eminence," he said, with an assumption of jocularity which sat uneasily upon him, "beware of this fair syren! from her lips flows an irresistible eloquence, and to permit oneself to listen to the Princess Matilda is to incur the risk of finding oneself compelled to yield her obedience!"

"Your words offend the princess as well as myself, Sire," the legate replied gravely: "Her Highness is as incapable of addressing an indiscreet request to me, as I am of listening to one."

"And I would fain suggest," interposed Matilda, "that Your Majesty has evidently discovered means to guard yourself against the influence of which you speak, since did it suffice for me to speak to be obeyed, you would long since have ceased importunities which are distasteful to me."

CHAPTER X.

In the privacy of her oratory, whose windows opened upon the ramparts of the city, Matilda was yielding to the influence of bright hopes which seemed so near fruition — weaving beautiful thoughts and ex-

alted aspirations wherewith to garland the brows of her hero.

Blushing, she recalled the nuptial pomp and ceremony with which the marriage of her brother and the loving-hearted Berengaria had been celebrated, and the joy with which the latter had pronounced her vows of eternal love and duty no longer surprised the young girl.

For more than an hour she had remained thus absorbed, passing from one sweet dream-picture to another, when the Countess of Leicester entered, announcing with some degree of hesitation that an unknown Arab was waiting without and requested permission to present to the princess in person, letters from the Prince Malek Adhel, of which he was the bearer.

"Bring him to me instantly," cried Matilda; "it is already late, the gates of Ptolemaïs will be closed in a few minutes, and the Arab will be lost if found within the city after the hour prescribed."

Hermione retired, returning shortly with a Mussulman soldier, whose closed visor and cautious bearing bore a certain air of mystery.

Controlling her agitation by an effort, the princess addressed her visitor, but he made no reply. Surprised at his silence and attributing it to Hermione's presence, she signed to her to retire.

Scarcely had the door closed upon her when the stranger threw himself at Matilda's feet.

"My beloved," he cried rapturously, "it is I!"

"Am I dreaming?" exclaimed the bewildered prin-

cess. "Is this an illusion of my overwrought fancy? Malek Adhel! Can it be!"

Malek Adhel did not reply; his heart was too full. He flung aside his helmet, and his beaming countenance, his ardent look, gave full assurance of the joyful reality.

The sudden shock of surprise and joy for a moment overcame the young girl, and she stood before him white and motionless as a marble statue. But he caught her to his heart, and like Pygmalion of old, revivified her with the sacred flame of his exceeding love.

But the princess repelled his caresses with gentle firmness.

"Not until God hath sanctioned our betrothal, Malek Adhel," she said, blushing softly.

"Always your God!" he cried passionately. "Matilda, would you have me hate Him, that you place Him continually between us?"

"Hush," she said, laying her small palm upon his lips, and as quickly withdrawing it freighted with a kiss; "do not blaspheme, Malek Adhel. But tell me quickly what brings you here? Have you seen the Archbishop of Tyre? Has his holy errand met with the success for which I have wearied Heaven, O my beloved . . . ?"

"I do not understand, Matilda; I have not seen the archbishop. He is not at Cæsarea. Love alone has brought me to your feet; no one save you knows of my presence here. My brother, proud as he is generous, would never have permitted that I should remain here, submitting myself to a humiliating delay. But I could

not await patiently away from you, a decision upon which my very life depends; I felt that I must see you at all hazards. So under the disguise of a common soldier, unknown even to Mohammed, I came hither with the embassy, while Saladin believes me occupied in visiting our fortifications at Ascalon and Jaffa."

"You have doubtless heard," asked the princess, blushing, "what answer the Crusader princes have returned to Saladin's envoy?"

"I know," he answered impatiently, "that Lusignan, who has the effrontery to aspire to your hand, has obtained their consent that an ecclesiastical council should alone decide the question of Saladin's propositions. I know that your brother has declared himself against me, and that he sustains and sanctions Lusignan's presumptuous hopes. It may be that Richard's wishes may influence the decision of the bishops; it may be, my beloved, that they will reject the proposed alliance, and command you to betray the pledge you have given me!"

He stopped suddenly, contemplating the painful alternative presented; then with passionate fervor he added:

"Would you obey them, Matilda? Would you permit them to barter the happiness, aye, the honor of your young life, to gain their own selfish ends? They would do this — they, Christian priests and rulers, under the pretext of religious or political policy, and yet lift up their righteous faces in indignant protest against the traffic of our country!"

Taking Malek Adhel's hand, Matilda drew him towards the crucifix surmounting her *prie-dieu*. With gentle force she compelled him to kneel with her before it.

"In the name of Him who died for you and me," she said, "I renew my vow never to belong to any other man!"

"I am not content with that, Matilda, it is not enough. Swear that you will be mine!"

"Willingly," she said. She clasped his hand once more, and placed it, thus united with her own, upon the holy Book. "For life — for Eternity; I await but one word to confirm an irrevocable promise. Malek Adhel, is my God your God?"

He started to his feet.

"What would you ask, Matilda!"

"My eternal happiness and your own — a union which even death could not sever," she answered with radiant countenance.

Like the angel of a new Revelation she appeared to him at that moment. The fountains of his heart were stirred to their innermost depths.

"Thy God shall be my God," he was about to answer; "whithersoever thou goest, I will go," when the sudden sound of rapid footsteps approaching in the corridor without recalled him to the exigency of the moment, and thrilled the heart of the princess with terror.

Scarcely had Malek Adhel resumed his helmet, when the Countess of Leicester entered with urgent haste.

"Your Highness," she said, "the gates of the city have just been closed. The King of Jerusalem declares, that while making a tour of inspection around the ramparts, he heard the sound of a strange voice proceeding from your apartments; and the sentinels stationed close by have informed him that a Mussulman was admitted hither and has not yet withdrawn. Lusignan has come himself to investigate the matter. He requests admittance, resolved to know, he says, what presumptuous mortal dares to intrude upon your privacy at such an hour, and infringe the rule which forbids all Mussulmans to remain after nightfall within the gates of Ptolemaïs."

"Let him come, then!" cried Malek Adhel, unable longer to hold his peace: "I am no less willing to vouchsafe the information, than he is to seek it. Perchance he may not live to regret his prying!"

Hermione uttered an exclamation of astonishment on recognizing Malek Adhel.

"What would you do?" cried the princess in wild alarm; "I shall be lost if you are recognized! Oh, Malek Adhel, as you value my fair fame, do not betray yourself. Follow my good Hermione, she will conduct you hence. Should you meet Lusignan, tell him you were unacquainted with the rule which forbids Mussulmans to remain in Ptolemaïs after night. Request leniency of him in my name. If he is angered and ventures to threaten you, I shall judge of your love for me by your silence."

The prince clasped her hand with passionate fervor.

"You ask me to prefer your honor before my own, Matilda. I obey. Let the remembrance of a sacrifice far greater than that of life, inform you what I shall claim the right one day to expect in return."

He turned and left the room, followed by the Countess of Leicester. At the outer door his egress was stopped by Lusignan, who awaited him with a small detachment of soldiers.

"Halt!" cried Lusignan. "How dare you, presumptuous Arab, remain in Ptolemaïs — remain, moreover, within the apartments of the Princess of England at this late hour? Know you not, knave, that the penalty is death?"

The Mussulman replied with an evident emotion that the beholders attributed to fear:

"I am a Saracen. But recently arrived within Mohammed's camp, I was ignorant of the regulations established in Ptolemaïs. I came hither as bearer of letters for the Princess Matilda from Malek Adhel."

"And were it but for the sake of him I so hate," cried Lusignan furiously, "I would punish you. In your person I will teach him what I hold in reserve for himself!"

"I would not counsel you to try it," retorted Malek Adhel proudly; "for that Heaven who inspired him with a courage that knows no fear, might bring him hither to teach you himself in the midst of your friends and soldiers, how he treats those who dare to offend him by their insolent speech and arrogant pretensions."

"Vile Saracen!" interrupted the King of Jerusalem,

trembling with rage, "do you think that I will patiently endure the taunts of a wretch like you! Seize him, guards; load him heavily with irons, and convey him to your darkest dungeon, pending the arrival of his master, with which he threatens us! We will then test the vaunted prowess of Malek Adhel."

"If the trial of arms pleases you, and death has no terrors," returned the Saracen, "I offer you, on the instant, combat *á l'outrance*. Come, the darkness shall not shelter you; my sword will find the way to your heart!"

"And think you," said Lusignan disdainfully, "that my royal dignity would permit me to measure swords with a low-born wretch like you? Go! To-morrow, friend and foe, Christian and Mussulman, shall learn with what disgraceful death such presumption is expiated. Take him, men!"

Malek Adhel with a quick movement drew his sword. Lusignan looked at him with amazement.

"Who are you, who can dream of self-defence under such circumstances?" he demanded.

A thrust of his sword would have been the reply, had Malek Adhel thought of himself alone. Yet, by permitting himself to be captured, he must inevitably be recognized, and Matilda thereby compromised.

In the emergency he bethought him of appealing to the honor of his enemy.

"Listen," he said bending forward and whispering in his ear, "I am Malek Adhel. If it is not my sword that informs you, it is to avoid a publicity offensive to

the sensitive reserve of her to whom we have both sworn fealty. According to the use you make of a secret which I entrust to your honor, I shall judge whether or not you are worthy of knighthood, and of the respect of a rival who hates you!"

"A thousand maledictions upon you!" cried Lusignan passionately; "yet you say truly," he added, controlling himself with a violent effort; "your confidence disarms me, and respect for the illustrious Princess of England ensures your present safety. But think not again to escape my vengeance."

"I shall not put your patience to too severe a test," the Saracen answered defiantly. "Meet me to-morrow, at sunset, in the grove of sycamores which lies close to the sea-shore, towards the gate you call Nazareth. One or the other of us will not return thence."

The King of Jerusalem made no reply but, turning to his soldiers, announced that the Mussulman had given ample satisfaction for his conduct; and enjoining discretion, ordered them to conduct their prisoner beyond the gates of the city and set him free.

Hermione unobserved, had witnessed this scene; and as soon as she was assured of the prince's safety, she hastened to rejoin Matilda, to report all she had seen and heard.

Matilda readily divined the secret which Malek Adhel had entrusted to Lusignan. She well knew that the arrogant pride of the latter would never have submitted to an insult, unless he who had so insulted him, in making himself known, had by this token of con-

fidence compelled him to prove himself worthy of it. But she was quite as sure that Malek Adhel could never have decided to curb his pride, or Lusignan to control his vengeful ire, save in the anticipation of a prompt satisfaction for insults given and received.

She could not doubt that a mortal challenge had passed between them, and although confident of her lover's invincible courage, yet Lusignan's prowess, aided by the hopes he would dare to entertain in view of the death of his rival, filled her with anxiety and alarm.

All through the night she meditated some plan whereby she might avert the impending danger from him she loved.

At an early hour the following morning, she dispatched a message to Richard, requesting his permission to celebrate that very day with becoming festivity the truce which had just been declared between the opposing armies. She furthermore begged that the entertainment proposed should be honored by his presence, as well as that of the other princes and chiefs among the Crusaders.

Surprised at her request, and provoked that his sister should desire to evince approval of an event which had annoyed him beyond measure, Richard was on the point of returning a refusal, but upon consideration he concluded that in assuming so prominent a part in the social world, she was, to all intents and purposes, publicly renouncing her monastic vows — thereby facilitating the accomplishment of the plans he had formed

for her; and he sent word in reply to her request that he not only sanctioned her proposition, but would recommend that her entertainment be attended with all due splendor and magnificence, adding that he would himself assist her in doing honor to her guests.

At the appointed hour, those whom the Princess of England had honored with invitations began to assemble beneath the rich and spacious tents which Richard, agreeably to his sister's instructions, had caused to be erected on the borders of the sea.

The King of Jerusalem was one of the first to present himself, hoping to be able to escape the earlier, in order to keep his appointment with Malek Adhel; and rejoicing in his power to avenge himself for Matilda's slights by permitting her to perceive that he was master of a secret which might become a dangerous one in his hands. But long before his plans were sufficiently matured to be brought into action, the princess' movements completely disconcerted them, and proved to him that personal fears in no wise occupied her atttention.

All the most illustrious sovereigns, brave knights, and beautiful women of the Christian world were assembled about the sumptuous board where the Princess of England presided with infinite grace and dignity. Towards the close of the banquet Matilda arose, making a sign that she would fain address her guests. A respectful silence immediately prevailed.

"With the permission of the king, my brother," she said, blushing to have thus called attention to herself,

"I would request all the knights here present to grant me a favor."

Without awaiting the king's sanction all the knights, with one accord, rose and promised an unconditional submission to the will of their lovely hostess. Nevertheless she awaited her brother's approval. Richard fearing lest he should commit himself, hesitated; however, the laws of chivalry forbade a refusal of his sister's request upon an occasion like the present, and with some degree of anxiety, he replied that, far from opposing the request she desired to make of the knights present, he was sufficiently acquainted with her good sense and discretion to himself undertake the required obligation, as far as its fulfilment was possible to him.

"Then since your majesty permits me to express my wish," she said, with gentle dignity, "I ask of you, Sire, as well as of all these brave knights who have sworn obedience to my request, that during the truce which has just been concluded with Saladin, all weapons of warfare shall be laid aside, and in joust and tournament no sharp-pointed steel shall be permitted; that in short, none among you, under any pretext whatsoever, shall violate the true spirit of the truce by giving or accepting mortal challenge, be it between Christian and Christian, or between Christian and Mussulman."

As she thus announced her wish, the knights lowered the points of their swords to the ground, declaring him coward and traitor who should dare to infringe his oath until relieved by the princess herself of the obligation.

Almost the last among the knights, came Guy de Lusignan. Kneeling with evident reluctance, he said in tones of reproach inaudible to all save Matilda:

"Ah, Madam, how painful it is for me to obey you to-day!"

Satisfied with the success which had attended her innocent scheming, Matilda unconsciously permitted some of the joy which filled her heart to overflow in kinder feeling upon those who had yielded it her, and to Lusignan, whose sacrifice had been the greatest, some token of her appreciation seemed most due.

"Believe me, I am grateful," she said softly in return.

It was the first approving word or look she had ever vouchsafed him, and although he could not but suspect the motive which had actuated her request, he yet congratulated himself upon having by a feigned concession to her will, discovered an open sesame to her heart. And forthwith he proceeded to indulge in more assured hopes of final success.

CHAPTER XI.

THE last rays of the setting sun were tinting the western skies with their gorgeous hues, while Malek Adhel still awaited Lusignan in the grove of sycamores. For hours he had been there pacing the ground with restless, impatient step, unwilling to accuse of cowardice one whose valor had never yet been impugned, yet

wondering at a delay which might at least give ground for such suspicion.

Presently, however, his anxious watch was rewarded; Lusignan appeared in the midst of a cloud of dust, spurring on his horse to its full speed. But as he approached, Malek Adhel perceived that he was unarmed; his left arm was unguarded by his shield and the right carried in lieu of sword only a pointless lance; a hat surmounted by flowing plumes replaced his helmet, and instead of a coat-of-mail, a flowing mantle of royal purple richly embroidered with gold floated from his shoulders.

Astonished and indignant, Malek Adhel demanded the explanation of an apparel so unbecoming the occasion of their rendezvous.

Lusignan informed his rival that Matilda, taking him unawares, had secured from him a promise to engage in no mortal combat during the existence of the truce. He purposely omitted to mention that the other knights had been bound by a similar promise, and managed to adroitly insinuate that the princess had not been unmindful of his own safety in the step she had taken.

Malek Adhel regarded him with haughty disdain.

"Lusignan," he said, "I may hate, but I can never fear you. Go; return to the Princess of England. Make use of all the artifices at your command to advance your suit with her. I know her too well to feel disturbed on your account."

He turned away with a courteous salute, and giving rein to his courser, sped rapidly across the sands.

But Malek Adhel was far from enjoying the tranquillity of mind of which he had spoken. Lusignan's words rankled deeply. Malek Adhel took little account of his rival's intimation that Matilda had been actuated by motives of anxiety for himself, nevertheless she had wronged him both in this implied doubt of his prowess in overcoming his opponent, and by condescending to demand a favor of his rival by engaging him to maintain peace.

Malek Adhel did not return immediately to Cæsarea. He had promised Saladin to inspect the fortifications at Ascalon and Jaffa, and although several days had been wasted in making the detour to Ptolemaïs, he resolved not to return with his mission unaccomplished. However, finding much time consumed by the visit to Ascalon, and Jaffa being of far less importance, he decided not to repair thither for the present but to return immediately to Cæsarea.

On his arrival there, Saladin hastened to inform him of Mohammed's return with the tidings that the Christians pending negotiations had requested a truce; that the majority seemed inclined to favor the proposed alliance, but that a final decision had been referred to a council of their bishops.

"The King of England," added the sultan, "announces that he desires to celebrate the truce with a round of brilliant festivities; they will be but a prelude to those which will mark one of the most splendid nuptial ceremonies the world has ever witnessed. I have a fancy, Malek Adhel, to accept Richard's friendly chal-

lenge, and attend these entertainments. It will be a rare sight — all these European kings gathered together from their distant kingdoms upon the soil of ancient Asia! I shall leave to you, brother, the duty of sustaining in their public games and tournaments your brilliant fame and the honor of the East, while I shall enjoy these gay scenes only as a spectator."

The prince clasped his brother's hand with affectionate warmth, but even while the all-powerful sultan was depicting in such glowing hues the happy future awaiting him, Matilda's voice seemed constantly repeating in tones of sorrowful warning: "Malek Adhel, is my God your God?"

Attended by a numerous suite and accompanied by his brother, Saladin took the road towards Ptolemaïs. Leading the cortége were fifty foot-soldiers, apparelled in long robes of rich brocade, their brows surmounted by silken turbans. In their charge were camels, some laden with the sultan's sumptuous tents, others with costly presents for the future Queen of Jerusalem. Next came a hundred horsemen with flashing armor and waving plumes, fifty preceding, fifty following the sultan and his brother. Mounted on Arabian steeds of the purest breed, Saladin was distinguishable for his austere gravity of deportment, Malek Adhel for his handsome face and form and martial bearing. As they pursued their way in amicable discourse the Mussul-

mans regarded the brothers with an honest pride; rejoicing at the thought of a reconciliation which insured strength to their cause and content to themselves.

On the third day of their march they perceived the higher towers of Ptolemaïs, and presently the city itself lay before them, crowned by the colors of the Cross and girdled with the camp of the Crusaders.

Reaching the foot of a wooded hill whence descended a torrent of clear water, Saladin commanded a halt and ordered his tents to be pitched. These preliminary arrangements completed, he despatched a messenger to apprise the Crusader princes of his arrival, and of his intention to participate in their festivities; intimating that his brother would meet the Christian knights in the friendly encounter of the lists.

At these tidings the camp was thrown into a state of the wildest excitement. The Crusaders one and all, were impatient to behold the great Saladin, the terror and the admiration of Christendom; and his brother, more feared and more famous still — the great prince who had demanded the hand of the beautiful Matilda of England.

Lusignan received the sultan's message with infinite anxiety and apprehension. He foresaw that Malek Adhel would snatch from him the honors of the jousts of which he had previously felt assured, and in consideration of the presence of the assembled princes and knights over whom he was usually victorious, and that of the fair princess to whose hand he aspired, the thought was not a pleasing one.

Nevertheless he concealed his disappointment; perceiving that Richard was pleased with the confidence in their honor, of which this act of Saladin gave the strongest proof. Coming thus without conditions, unprotected save by the honor of his enemies, Saladin's confidence in them seemed to give warrant of a corresponding degree of magnanimity in himself. Richard himself was too generous not to appreciate the quality in another; hence, forgetting all feelings of personal animosity, he spared no praise of an act which so flattered his chivalric pride, and determined to give an answering proof of confidence by an early visit to the sultan and his brother.

Unattended by suite or guard of honor, Richard forthwith proceeded to Saladin's encampment. The sultan, well pleased with this act of courtesy, offered his hand to the English monarch with unaffected cordiality.

"Great king," he said, "at our last meeting you taught me the danger of having you for an enemy; to-day I learn what pleasure your friendship would confer."

"May we not hope you will allow us to claim from you the proud title of friend, illustrious Richard?" said Malek Adhel with some emotion, as he traced upon the king's manly countenance a resemblance to the face so dear to him; "nay more, may we not add that of ally — of brother?"

At the sight of the prince, the remembrance of his defeat flashed across Richard's haughty spirit, and he answered coldly:

"Ere he had beheld you, great warrior, Richard had never learnt to fly. Must his sister's hand repay you for the humiliating lesson?"

"Nay, noble Richard, what victory can be as glorious as such retreat? Like a desert lion you fell upon our armies, marking your passage with proofs of an almost incredible valor. Even when forced to retreat by overwhelming numbers, your hand left us direful token of your strength and courage."

The frank address and honest countenance of Malek Adhel pleased Richard even more than the flattering import of his words, and he could not long resist an influence which the prince obtained over all who came in contact with him — an influence due to a sincerity of purpose which imparted a certain grace to his speech, and dignity to his every act.

The conversation which ensued was of some duration. Richard mentioned the ties which bound him to the destinies of Lusignan, and acknowledged the regret he would experience should the ecclesiastical council compel him to forego the fulfilment of his promises to his friend. He did not deny that but for a vow in which his honor was involved, he would have been delighted with the proposed alliance, and proud to behold in his sister a gage of peace between two worlds.

While he spoke, Malek Adhel had with difficulty refrained from interrupting him; but when he had comprehended from Richard's words that in the event of the decision of the bishops being unfavorable to

himself, Matilda would in all probability be compelled to give her hand to Lusignan, he could control himself no longer.

"Sire," he said firmly, "the hand of the Princess Matilda is no longer free. It was promised me, with her heart, in the desert from whose horrors I was fortunate enough to rescue her."

"I am well aware," returned the king, "of the promise the imprudent girl ventured to give you; but I know equally well that the head of our Church has the right, as he will have the will, to break an engagement unsanctioned by religion. Believe me, Malek Adhel, you would be unwise to place too much reliance upon her promise."

"Nevertheless, I shall rely upon it in full faith, until death releases her," cried Malek Adhel proudly; "I shall rely upon it as I do upon my own honor, or upon yours!"

Richard would have retorted, but Saladin interposed.

"Why allow yourselves to be thus carried away by passion?" he said; "let us at least await in peace and amity the hour when fate will perhaps require us to meet once more as enemies. When the council of priests shall have announced its decision, it will be time to discover whether we must mutually swear war to the death, or a compact of peace and fraternity. Until then let us prove to the world that we understand the amenities of peace as well as the duties of strife."

With a simultaneous movement Richard and Malek Adhel, impressed by the sultan's reasoning, and ashamed

of their unseemly warmth, grasped each other's hands with renewed cordiality.

It was now the hour for the opening of the lists. Richard so informed Saladin, begging him to honor with his presence the festivities now being inaugurated.

"And you also, brave Prince," he added, addressing Malek Adhel; "may we not aspire to the honor of measuring lances with you? My sister bestows the prize upon the successful knight — doubtless you will wish to contend for it."

"Gladly!" the Saracen replied, his countenance aglow with pleasure. He turned to an equerry in attendance, with the evident purpose of giving orders for the necessary preparations for the contest; but Richard stopped him.

"Pardon me, Prince, if I must request you to moderate your impetuous valor for a time. To-day we must ask the honor of your presence at our tournament as a witness only; so the judges of the lists have decreed. To-morrow the field of honor will be open to you!"

"To-morrow!" repeated Malek Adhel with undisguised disappointment; "and to-day I must behold Lusignan triumphant! Well, so be it — to-morrow's success must repay me for to-day's deprivation! But may I not at least see the Princess Matilda," he added after a moment's silence; "may I not offer her my duty in person?"

"Pardon me, Prince, but even to our Christian knights the privilege of admittance to my sister's espe-

cial presence has never been conceded. But she will accompany the queen to the tournaments, and participate in the entertainments succeeding them. There you will be at liberty to see and converse with her."

So saying, Richard took leave of the brothers; and shortly after, the clear loud notes of trumpets proceeding from the direction of the camp, announced that the lists were about to open and the tilts to begin.

CHAPTER XII.

THE moment Saladin and his brother appeared within the limits of the camp, Richard, followed by the flower of the Christian chivalry, hastened to meet and welcome them.

After mutual expressions of courtesy and good will had been exchanged between the Crusader princes and nobles, and their distinguished guests, the latter were conducted with due ceremony to a gorgeous balcony prepared for their reception, overlooking the scene of the coming contest.

Saladin seated himself upon an elaborate throne cushioned and spread with cloth of gold, and overhung with oriflames broidered with the arms of the Crescent.

Malek Adhel sat one step lower, his accoutrements of battle were exchanged for a rich vestment thrice dipped in the royal purple of Tyre; above the gleaming steel of his helmet three white plumes swayed to and

fro in the breeze; at his side hung a Damascus blade with jewelled hilt, worth a prince's ransom.

With searching eye Malek Adhel gazed anxiously about him; soon his anxiety became disappointment. Matilda had not yet appeared.

The lists were about to open, and he was refused admittance. Disappointment was reflected upon a countenance which had never been tutored to concealment.

The Lord of Coucy perceived the prince's gravity of mien and divined its cause. He drew near the balcony where he sat in inglorious ease.

"Prince," he said, "it seems strange to you, doubtless, to remain idle while a trial of arms is going on around you. Excuse us for having so decided it. 'Tis the highest compliment we could render to your valor, since it proves our fears that in allowing you to contend with us on every occasion, no Christian knight could dare hope for victory."

But Malek Adhel was too much preoccupied to make a suitable response to the Crusader's delicate flattery.

"My lord," he said with honest frankness, "since I may not to-day contend for the prize with which the hand of the Princess of England will endow the victor, I beg that you will not allow Lusignan to obtain it."

"And why should you do him the honor to be more jealous of him than of me?" inquired de Coucy with some irritation.

"Should the princess have been required to choose

between you and him," answered Malek Adhel, "I should fear your success infinitely more; but the pretensions of Lusignan, upheld by Richard's approval, are apparent to all; and I confess my desire that they should likewise, before the eyes of all, be humiliated."

De Coucy grasped his hand with a reassuring smile.

Just then the gates at either end of the lists were thrown open, and the sound of drum and trumpet announced the commencement of the contest. At the same moment the Queen of England appeared upon a balcony opposite to the sultan's, and closely following her, escorted by Lusignan, came the Princess Matilda.

In the desert her touching loveliness had enthralled the senses of the Saracen prince; he now beheld her, surrounded by the accessories of rank and splendor, in the full perfection of her dazzling beauty. A robe of silvery gauze, richly ornamented with sprays of glittering gems, following the graceful undulations of her perfect form, revealed its rounded outlines. A dainty tissue of cerulean hue confined the waving masses of her blonde hair. On her white brow sat enthroned a sweet serenity; in her blue eyes and upon her delicate lips flitted ever and anon, like some imprisoned sprite, an expression of gladness she could not have repressed had she desired to do so.

Beside himself with rapturous delight, the impulsive prince rose, and with his gaze still steadfastly fixed upon this vision of bewildering loveliness, he grasped his brother's hand.

"Behold her, Saladin!" he cried; "could houri be more beautiful?"

The faultless beauty of the princess indeed surprised the austere sultan and elicited from him an enthusiastic expression of admiration.

"Thanks be to Mahomet," he added, "that affection anticipated the requirements of justice; for upon beholding this fair cause of your weakness, how could I have refused to forgive you!"

Just then Berengaria, recognizing the prince, saluted him, her fair face beaming with pleasure and welcome. Matilda's eyes met his for one brief moment, a delicate flush coloring her cheek and increasing the charm of her exquisite beauty. Then she turned from him to reply to some remark from Count Hugh of Tiberias — perhaps, too, to shield her tell-tale face from other eyes than those of her lover — prying eyes that from all quarters centered upon it, anxious to discern the mysteries of her girlish heart.

"Right willing am I to die for you, Saladin," said Malek Adhel, intoxicated with love; "but I swear to you I will not live without her!"

Suddenly a long, loud blast was sounded, the barriers on either side the lists were withdrawn, and the combatants entering, mingled in indiscriminate confusion. Strength, agility, valor, meeting on equal grounds, tested their advantage. Lusignan, as though inspired with superhuman powers, engaged in the most intricate passages of arms, ever coming forth victorious. Presently, mounted on a fiery horse whose restive im-

patience matched his own, he raised his lance aloft and gave a last challenge. The next moment lances met and shivered, sparks flew, men and horses rolled in inextricable confusion to the ground.

Lusignan and de Coucy alone retained their positions, each eager to obtain a victory the more prized because so valiantly disputed. They retired as if with one accord to their respective starting-points, replaced their broken weapons, and with poised lance and loosened reins rushed upon each other. At the first shock their lances broke short in their hands. With flaming eyes, forgetting in the excitement of the moment the oath they had sworn to the princess, they drew their swords. The spectators looked on spell-bound.

But the umpires approaching, reminded the combatants of the prescribed regulations of the tournament which permitted the use of blunt weapons only.

The haughty rivals, thus compelled to relinquish hopes of shedding each other's blood, sheathed their swords and recommenced the fray with the stumps of their broken lances. Now closely pressing, now feigning to falter in order to disarm the other's vigilance, now flying, now pursuing, they whirled about the arena amid the enthusiastic applause of the spectators.

Malek Adhel followed their rapid course with eager eye; not a movement was lost upon him. With unrepressed anxiety he watched the chances of success in favor of de Coucy, was elated when victory seemed almost within his grasp, indignant when he faltered, yet recognized withal in Lusignan an opponent worthy of

himself. Presently the Lord of Coucy had gained the vantage. He had seized his antagonist, and throwing him heavily to the ground flung himself upon him; but at the moment when all considered Lusignan's defeat beyond peradventure, with an adroit movement he regained his feet and almost simultaneously clasping de Coucy in his vigorous arms as he endeavored to recover from the shock, cast him prone upon the ground.

A regretful cry escaped Malek Adhel. Lusignan responded with a look of arrogant satisfaction, and turning to the still prostrate figure of the French hero, obliged him to acknowledge defeat.

Loud acclamations greeted Lusignan's hard-won triumph, and cries were heard:

"All honor to Lusignan! honor to the King of Jerusalem!"

Saladin and his brother exchanged glances of ill-concealed derision as the name of Lusignan was heard coupled with a title to which he could no longer lay claim; and a bitter smile crossed the lips of the Saracen prince as the victor, gazing about him triumphantly, passed beneath the balcony occupied by the Princess of England and, saluting her, ascended the steps to receive from her hand the prize he had just won. He knelt on one knee before Matilda and kissed her hand, and she, as in duty bound, encircled his neck with a magnificent golden chain.

At this sight Malek Adhel could contain himself no longer; anger flamed in his eyes and burned upon his dark cheek. In the heat of passion, he became unjust

and accused her he loved. He would have had her refuse, thus publicly, to reward his detested rival. He longed with a burning impatience to reproach her; yet how could he speak before so many witnesses, knowing, as he did, that upon his every word and look were bent prying eyes, ready, nay, eager to add their weight in disfavor of his suit. But ere long he would be permitted to meet her face to face, possibly to speak with her.

In a spacious pavilion erected on the sea-shore, a ball succeeded the rougher pastime of the tilt. Saladin and his brother were cordially solicited to participate, but the former, preoccupied with the weightier matters of his empire, and indifferent to the gayeties of life, excusing himself, retired to his tent, leaving Malek Adhel to follow his inclination.

Indignant at finding himself thus compelled to give way to his arrogant rival, yet unable to endure the thought of leaving Matilda to the undisputed attentions of Lusignan by remaining absent, reluctant, too, to be deprived of the pleasure of beholding his beloved, if that alone was permitted him, Malek Adhel acceded to Richard's request and repaired to the ball-room.

Richard was awaiting him and conducted him to the queen. Malek Adhel bowed respectfully before Berengaria. Fearing to displease her haughty lord, she endeavored to repress the emotion she experienced on beholding one to whom her grateful heart acknowledged so many benefactions, but quick-welling tears with mute eloquence expressed her remembrance.

"Ah, Prince," she murmured softly, "would that I could return but a portion of the many obligations I owe you!"

"Your majesty knows full well the one blessing I have come hither to seek," he answered earnestly.

"Nor would you seek it in vain or with impatient waiting, were the power to bestow it upon you mine, Prince," she replied, in the same cautious tones.

He thanked her with a look eloquent with gratitude, then turned to salute Matilda, who had remained half concealed behind the queen's chair. Near her stood Lusignan with haughty and self-complacent mien, seeming to mock at while preventing the homage his rival would have fain offered her. Exasperated that his enemy should thus on every occasion succeed in keeping him at a distance from Matilda, Malek Adhel regarded her for a moment with eyes full of reproach and pain; the hand she was about to offer him fell by her side; her blue eyes filled with tears. In a moment he was subdued — remorseful. Perhaps, defying Lusignan, forgetful of his surroundings, he would have obeyed impulses so little habituated to control, and however inopportunely have taken advantage of the moment to address to the princess the complaints and self-reproach which filled his heart; but just then a strain of lively music announced that dancing was about to commence. To Lusignan, as victor of the tournament, belonged the honors of the entertainment; he had the privilege of a first choice among the fair ladies present with whom to open the ball. Bowing low he offered his arm to

the Princess of England, and carried her off in triumph from beneath the very eyes of his rival. Every eye was upon them as they crossed the vast room to the place of honor. Lusignan had doffed his weighty armor; a short mantle richly embroidered, hung from his shoulders; light, gold spurs ornamented his shapely feet; his countenance was radiant with triumph and joy, his supple, well-knit figure yielded gracefully to the various movements of a slow and stately dance. Never had he appeared to such advantage as in this his hour of triumph.

Yet his satisfaction was not altogether complete. True, his rival, foiled at all points and condemned to obscurity by the splendor of his own triumph, was even now writhing in impotent rage; true, Matilda, for this evening at least, was his; he could detain her at his side, could compel her to hearken to his words of wooing, yet he could not conceal from himself the evident repugnance with which the young princess yielded to the requirements of etiquette and the commands of her brother.

Compelled to accept the distasteful attentions of Lusignan, and to appear with him in the dance before the eyes of an admiring assemblage, a sweet gravity of demeanor, a listlessness of movement gave ample warrant that her own choice would never have placed her in so trying a situation, yet diminished nothing from the exquisite charm of her countenance and bearing.

The triple rows of spectators, seated on sumptuously garnished estrades and clothed in splendid apparel, the

massive gildings and translucent crystal of candelabra reflecting the light of myriads of waxen tapers, the pomp of royalty, the beauty of fair dames, the manly presence of gallant knights, united in forming a scene of rare brilliancy.

In the midst of all this magnificence and display, the Saracen prince remained unmoved, he saw only the graceful figure of Matilda floating through the dance, he thought only of means to obtain a moment's conversation with her.

Meanwhile lighter dances succeeded the stately movement with which the ball had been inaugurated and Matilda requested to be conducted to her seat beside the queen.

A desire, at first timidly ventured yet quickly gaining ground, was expressed by the guests to behold the lovely princess once more join the dancers, supported by the other aspirant to her fair hand — Malek Adhel.

The prince, elated at his opportunity, hastened to claim the honor thus universally awarded him. With a softly blushing cheek and brightening eyes the princess rose, placing her hand in her lover's.

Lusignan enraged, rushed forward, but ere he had separated the lingering clasp of their interlacing fingers, Matilda had slipped into Malek Adhel's hand a small note and a key.

The prince amazed as much by the unexpected favor of the young girl as at the audacity of Lusignan, for a moment seemed stupefied.

"My rights as victor, entitle me to proclaim myself

your sole knight for this day, fair Princess," he said; "and even were I disposed to yield somewhat in favor of another, think you I would honor *you* with the choice?" he added, turning abruptly toward Malek Adhel.

The prince turned white to the lips.

"You do well, Lusignan," he said, "to avail yourself of your rights to-day, for I swear it will be the last. To-morrow belongs to me; to-morrow you will probably not be able to condemn me to remain quiescent in order that you may carry off the honors; to-morrow and every day thereafter we shall see which of us two will claim the honor of attending the illustrious Matilda!"

He turned on his heel without awaiting a reply to his taunt, and with a strange joy thrilling his entire being sought some retired spot where he might satisfy, beyond a doubt, the blissful anticipations with which the princess' gift had inspired him.

The tiny note, the key attached, what promise might they not convey, what daring thoughts suggest! Could he venture to place faith in the whisperings of his hopes? What joyful tidings would this paper announce, what happiness would this small key open to him?

It was the first time the tracings of that beloved hand had greeted his sight; with trembling eagerness he broke the seal and perused the few words Matilda had written.

"To-morrow, at early dawn," the note ran, "this key will open Montmorency's tomb. I will seek you there:

"MATILDA."

Malek Adhel read and re-read the simple words before him, wondering whether he discerned their sense aright. *A rendezvous!*

He was too happy to give room to conjecture, yet this strange proceeding of his modest love surprised him beyond measure.

A strange proceeding truly, from one so young, so pure: for she was now sufficiently acquainted with the ways of the world to know that such an act as this would greatly compromise her. Yet, timid as she was concerning the censure of men, Matilda feared still more to displease her God. No promptings of human love could have directed her steps to this secret meeting; a stronger—a divine voice seemed to command her to leave no means untried, which religion did not forbid, to reclaim a noble soul to God's service. Besides, great sacrifice must be required of him, a sacrifice which the delay of a day might render fruitless. Before such important considerations as those which occupied her thoughts, she gave little heed to appearances, yet notwithstanding the purity—I had almost said the holiness of her motives—as the first rays of the new day announced the hour for her appointment with her lover, her modesty took alarm, she hesitated, wavered.

Conscious love weakened her resolution, but duty, giving it strength, prevailed.

At sunrise she entered her chariot and surrounded by her women and attended by her guards quitted Ptolemaïs. Thus only would Richard permit her to go forth to breathe the fresh air beyond the city. He had even forbidden that any gallant whatsoever, be he Christian or Mussulman, should be permitted to approach her.

The princess directed her people to proceed towards Montmorency's tomb. At the foot of the hill the chariot stopped; the guards formed into files, saluting Matilda as she passed through their midst, followed by her women.

At the door of the monument she paused with wildly-throbbing heart.

"Oh my God," was her silent adjuration, "if human love hath misled me; if a desire to see, to hear Malek Adhel, hath added its influence to the motive which impels me hither, suffer me not to pass this threshold, recall my life rather, ere it hath learnt to blush for having dared to mingle creature-worship with that I would offer Thee!"

One moment more she stood, as though awaiting assurance of the rectitude of her purpose, then she turned to her attendants.

"Leave me here to the solitude of my own meditations," she said: "I wish to pray for the advancement of our faith and the conversion of Infidels."

Accustomed to the frequent retirement of the princess, for purposes of prayer and meditation within the tomb of Montmorency, her women were not at all

surprised by her directions, and withdrew a short distance to await the pleasure of their pious lady.

Matilda and the archbishop alone possessed keys to Montmorency's mausoleum; William on his departure had entrusted his to the princess, little dreaming it was fated to pass into the hands of Malek Adhel. But Matilda, conscious of the integrity of her motives, did not fear the censure of her spiritual adviser.

Nevertheless, she trembled with agitation as she entered and penetrated the gloomy obscurity where reposed the remains of the French hero.

The interior was hung in black; a costly lamp of solid silver, suspended from the dome, burned steadily, shedding a weird and solemn light upon the funereal surroundings. By its faint rays she discerned Malek Adhel. He, too, perceived her at the same moment, and hurried forward to greet her. He would have clasped her to his heart, but she gently yet firmly repelled him, making him a sign to keep silence. He obeyed, but his look, his countenance, were eloquent with a love and happiness that would not be restrained.

CHAPTER XIII.

"MALEK ADHEL," said the princess, her beautiful eyes drooping beneath his too ardent gaze, "you must surely believe it was not for the purpose of listening to words of love, or of yielding to the promptings of my

own heart, that I have come hither to meet you. Unseemly would it be thus to profane the tomb — insult the dead. Words spoken beside these sacred ashes should be holy and sacred ones."

Malek Adhel was awed by the severe dignity of her manner. The impetuous passion that filled his being seemed chilled, yet could not be altogether subdued.

"Matilda," he said earnestly, "afar from you as in your presence, I think only of our love; it is the greatest blessing Heaven could bestow . . . "

"The greatest among earthly blessings," she interrupted hastily; "but earthly blessings are not to be held as of the first importance in a Christian's aspirations. Malek Adhel, believe me, the chief desire of my heart, your eternal salvation, has alone influenced me in taking a step, which, in order not to be a most rash one, must have been actuated by the purest and holiest motives. To-morrow the council of the bishops meets, and the venerable William has not yet returned. Our fate lies in their hands, their decision will be declared, and still you grope in the shadows of error. Will the holy fathers of our Church dare, for political reasons, to give me to an Infidel husband? And should they so decide, will my own conscience permit me to consent?"

"What do you say, Matilda?" cried the prince, surprise and anger struggling within him. "Have I heard aright? If your priests bestowed you upon me I should not yet have overcome all the obstacles to our union — I should still have the infinite, the unexpected pain of discovering another of your own raising?"

"Alas!" she returned; "I fear it would not prove an insurmountable one. I am weak, and love is strong, and you are very near to God in my heart! But I am wasting the precious moments. Listen, Malek Adhel, to the reasons which have induced my presence here. You are unacquainted with the cause of William's absence from Ptolemaïs; you are unaware of the immense obligations you owe to him. If he has quitted the court with all its luxuries and splendor, if he has laid aside for a time his mitre and his purple, 'tis for your sake! Inspired by a divine charity, sustained by his noble virtues, he has departed hence for Cæsarea alone and unprotected for the sole purpose of seeing and conversing with you, of employing all the force of his eloquence to persuade you of the truth of our blessed faith."

"When I left Cæsarea the archbishop had not yet arrived there," said the prince.

"And yet he had departed about a week before that—shall I say sweet, shall I say dreadful day?—when you surprised me in Ptolemaïs."

"Oh, my beloved," he interrupted her, "no days are dreadful save those which separate us!"

"And yet it is such days I am here to ask of you," she replied with a sweet serenity. "Malek Adhel, honor, gratitude, our interests even, equally require that you should abandon the evanescent glory which awaits you in our tournaments, that you should relinquish the joy of our happy meetings, and go forth immediately in search of the unfortunate old man who at this moment,

perhaps, languishes in irons, or expires in torture, because your salvation has been dearer to him than his own life."

"Heavens! Matilda, what do you ask? You would have me leave you?"

"On the instant. When danger is imminent, duty is imperative. There is not a moment to be lost."

"You wish me to withdraw — to withdraw on the very day in which I should have humbled the arrogant Lusignan, and given you evidence of what prowess I may possess!"

"Oh, Malek Adhel, to what amounts a victory over Lusignan? Have you not, times innumerable, won laurels far more glorious? And yet, beyond the vain satisfaction of a high renown, what fruit have they produced? But there are triumphs, Malek Adhel, new to you, perhaps, and more glorious far than those which have hitherto crowned your career — triumphs over one's own impulses, triumphs of duty over selfish considerations, triumphs of virtue over worldly advantages. Malek Adhel, why should you care to humble Lusignan! would not his mortification be dearly purchased at the price of all you would sacrifice to compass it? Would you not attain a more exalted honor by overcoming yourself, than by overcoming one so far your inferior? Oh, be influenced by me; forego a preassured victory; consent even, if it must be, that my hand should once more crown Lusignan victor in the joust; and, secure of my love, hasten to deserve it more completely by answering the call of gratitude and suffering humanity."

"But why need I perform this errand in person, Matilda? May I not send in my place some one of my faithful servitors in search of the archbishop?"

"Send some one in your place, when the point in question is a generous act!" she interrupted quickly. "Do not allow me to believe this possible; do not let me believe that another could lend so much zeal, experience so much pleasure, in succoring the unfortunate. Malek Adhel, if you, although a Mussulman, did not by some providential dispensation surpass in virtue all other men, where should I find excuse for the love I bear you? Only your rare penetration, your unfailing energy may be able to trace and follow the fate of our venerable friend; and should my fears prove not unfounded, and William have been seized and imprisoned, you only, throughout Saladin's empire, have power to open his dungeon and set him free. Ah, how greatly such an act would increase his grateful regard, the esteem of all Christians, my own love for you. And when the world should learn that you had turned away from brilliant triumphs to render assistance to an unfortunate old man, think you your renown would lose one ray of lustre? Would not the title of liberator of William of Tyre better serve your cause before the council of bishops, than that of conqueror of Lusignan? And should all these advantages fail you, would not the satisfaction of your own conscience, the approval of God, the love of Matilda, be sufficient reward . . .?"

"You have conquered, Matilda," exclaimed the prince, kneeling before her; "I obey you. Oh, divine

being, you open before me a new world; you have taught me that there exists a higher content than that obtained by self-indulgence; you have proved that the practice of exalted virtues confers more exquisite rapture than even love itself. Matilda, if you be not a rare marvel from the creative Hand, if Europe possesses other women like yourself, I no longer wonder at the homage they receive, nor at the influence they exert. Oh, fortunate Christian knights, no longer vaunt your valor! How easy it must be when the object which inspires you with love, inspires you likewise with the desire for glory! — I obey you, Matilda; and already the sacrifice you require of me seems less painful."

"My Father, I thank Thee," cried the princess raising her tearful eyes to Heaven. "What more fitting tabernacle than this noble soul for the reception of Thy holy Spirit! When wilt Thou deign to enlighten it? — When wilt Thou set the seal of Thy approval upon this grand nature? And thou, O noble Montmorency," she added, suddenly throwing herself upon her knees before Montmorency's coffin, "redouble thy prayers, implore those of all God's chosen saints for the salvation of Malek Adhel. Speak for him, happy spirit, as thou didst speak when death was first opening unto thee the gates of Heaven. Reconcile Malek Adhel to his God!"

For a moment the prince hesitated; then he knelt beside her with reverent bearing.

"Illustrious hero," he said, "thou whose life I admired, whose dust I honor; thou whose friendship I coveted, whose death I bewailed; thou whose rivalry

alone I could forgive while dreading; doubtless this handful of ashes is not all that remains of one of the noblest works of the Creator. Thy spirit lives — animated still by the qualities which glorified it while in this life; then speak unto my soul, teach me how to reconcile honor and fraternal affection with love!"

"My beloved," said the young girl rising, "God in His wisdom has placed an impenetrable barrier between ourselves and those who have preceded us to the great Hereafter: but go to the venerable William. He will solve your perplexing doubts; he will make all clear before you. Hasten. Lose not a moment. Do not return to the camp; do not even inform Saladin of your departure, he might seek to detain you. The delay of a day may render all our plans futile. The ecclesiastical council meets to-morrow; possibly it may not remain in session longer than a week. Before its expiration you must have found William and brought him here; before its close you must have become enlightened by the force of the prelate's eloquence; then he will speak favorably of our union before the bishops; and, as you know, none have yet resisted William's wise counsels."

"My beloved," replied Malek Adhel despondently, "you fill me with foreboding fears. I cannot renounce you, nor yet can I consent to betray a brother who has overwhelmed me with proofs of his affection. You alone, Matilda, can reconcile these conflicting duties; consent to wed a Mussulman; I shall be one only in name, in secret I will worship your God . . ."

"No, Malek Adhel," she interrupted shaking her head sadly; "my Saviour has said: 'Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father.' — Yet should William counsel me to this union; should his wisdom discern in it a means of reconciling you to God, I confess I should readily incline to his opinion. Go then, Malek Adhel, seek William. He loves you as he would have loved his own son, and this unconfessed tenderness will, perhaps, influence him to greater indulgence and more sanguine hopes. Perhaps he may recommend to me what otherwise I would not dare consent to . . ."

"What influence your words obtain over me, Matilda," cried the prince rapturously; "what influence may you not exert hereafter!"

"Farewell then," she said, opening her arms to him with an irresistible impulse of tenderness; "go seek the faithful servitor of my God, and bring me back the warrant of our happiness."

"My betrothed! my bride!" he murmured, straining her to his heart.

His passionate fervor troubled her pure spirit; she disengaged herself from arms that would have held her there forever, and, her hand still imprisoned in his, she turned partially away, leaning her forehead against one of the marble caryatides upholding the canopy beneath which rested Montmorency's coffin.

They stood thus in utter silence for several moments,

the very air around them seeming to pulsate with passionate life and warmth, despite the shadows and the gloom, the chillness of the tomb, the near presence of death itself.

Then withdrawing her hand with a gentle pressure from her lover's, Matilda turned to leave the funereal chamber, that in the isolation in which her departure would leave the place Malek Adhel might retire in safety.

But the sound of voices at the door suddenly filled the princess with terror.

"'Tis I, Matilda," cried Berengaria; "I have come with the king to meet you; we do not wish you to remain so long alone in this dismal spot."

"Oh God, we are lost!" exclaimed the princess; "Richard is there. If he enters—if he sees you—your life will pay for my imprudence.—Oh, Malek Adhel, we will at least die together!"

"Fear not, my beloved," he whispered reassuringly; "he shall not suspect my presence here."

As he spoke, Malek Adhel, bending low on the side of the coffin opposite to the entrance, concealed himself beneath the heavy folds of the pall which swept the floor.

As she hurriedly rearranged the disturbed drapery, a new and sudden terror thrilled the heart of the young girl: Malek Adhel thus enshrouded among the gloomy trappings of death! Was this an omen of fearful import? She turned pale at the thought, and with trembling hand opened the door to Berengaria.

Surprised at the expression of pale dismay so evident upon the young girl's face, the queen inquired the cause of her agitation.

She looked at her with eyes like those of the hunted doe; twice she essayed to speak; the words froze upon her white lips. Richard gazed fixedly at her.

"Never," he said, "have I beheld youth so attracted by the gloomy surroundings of death; never have I witnessed such a reluctant and painful withdrawal from them!"

As he spoke, Richard resolutely entered the interior of the monument. His sister followed him; and pausing in the doorway she stood, with all Richard's determination, all Richard's spirit, thrilling her veins with a stronger, firmer courage, ready to rush forward, to interpose her woman's heart between her brother's weapon and the life of him she loved, should the dread occasion arise.

But after a cursory survey of the funereal chamber, Richard reappeared. His undisturbed serenity assured Matilda that he had discovered no sign of her lover's presence. As he crossed the threshold he turned and closed the door, locking it after him.

"You will be custodian of this key no longer, sister mine," he said; "nor will you again enter this gloomy abode; such surroundings do not befit the natural inclinations of youth, nor are they healthful."

She bowed her head meekly to her brother's mandate, her heart too full of relief at her lover's escape — too full of gladness for the success which had crowned

her mission there, to repine for the one sweet satisfaction denied her of prayer and meditation in the solitude of this sacred spot.

CHAPTER XIV.

LATER in the day the festivities were continued. The lists, it was publicly announced, would be open to Mussulman as well as Christian. Saladin, eager to witness and enjoy his brother's triumph over the knights of the Cross, repaired at an early hour to the scene of the contest.

The moments sped swiftly by, yet Malek Adhel did not appear. In consideration for their illustrious guests, the opening of the lists was postponed for an hour — and still another.

While they waited, with what patience they were able to muster, the eyes of the spectators ever and anon sought the countenance of the Princess of England, endeavoring to read with what view she regarded the apparent slight to herself this strange delay seemed to suggest. But in serene content she awaited the commencement of the tilt, more proud of her lover than if she had beheld him there before her reaping laurels amid the plaudits of the assembled multitude.

Presently Lusignan came and stood beside her.

"Malek Adhel is slow, Your Highness," he said with cutting irony, "to carry out the execution of his threats, and not over eager to justify to-day the self-con-

fidence of victory which he vaunted yesterday. It would at least be more consonant with knightly devoir to sustain as best he might his arrogant pretensions."

"Sire," replied the princess with freezing dignity, "Malek Adhel is far above the power of slanderous insinuation; his courage, like his honor, is beyond suspicion. If he fails in the obligations of a minor duty, rest assured it is because those of a far more important one claim his attention."

She rose, excusing herself with a stately grace, and joined Berengaria, who was seated a short distance beyond.

Lusignan was confounded. He sought Richard, inquiring whether he was sure that his sister had received neither message nor visit from Malek Adhel. The king endeavored to reassure him. Nevertheless Lusignan's suspicions were aroused; he recalled the circumstance of Malek Adhel's surreptitious visit to Matilda's apartments, which only an accident had disclosed to himself.

But the sound of trumpets announced the expiration of the time allotted to await the Saracen prince, and the opening of the lists.

The knights and warriors hastened to the friendly contest. Mussulman and Christian met on equal ground. For a while victory poised hesitating between the defenders of the Cross and the maintainers of the Crescent. Kaled overthrew the most valiant of the knights, but he in turn succumbed to the prowess of Lusignan.

A second time was the prize he had won bestowed upon Lusignan by Matilda's hand; and again the next day, and several following.

Meanwhile a strange restlessness pervaded the camp. Saladin had become anxious, and then alarmed, at the absence of his brother. To thus abandon an almost assured victory over a detested rival; to desert, thus inopportunely, the scene where the most important events of his life were being decided; to slight, by his withdrawal, the object of his absorbing passion, appeared to the sultan proceedings so incomprehensible, that but one solution to the mystery presented itself. He was aware of the impetuous courage of Malek Adhel, of the violence of his passions. Could he who had never yet known defeat have succumbed at last before the universal destroyer?

Racked by such anxious fears, Saladin despatched emissaries in every direction to seek his brother. Meanwhile time sped by, and the day was near at hand upon which the council of bishops would pronounce a decision of such grave importance.

The discussions of the reverend fathers had been enveloped in the most profound mystery, and none divined to which side the weight of their sanction would lean.

Vainly Lusignan endeavored to penetrate their design; vainly, in order to obtain partisans among them, did he wield the secret weapons of intrigue; vainly did he intimate that to his influence were they indebted for the high mission with which Christianity had invested

them; he failed in gaining the ascendency over their religious scruples, or in obtaining an influence over their judgment. The more they recognized the importance of the trust reposed in them, the more resolved they were to prove themselves worthy of so high an honor. It was not only the political interests of the two empires upon which they were called upon to decide, but those of religion as well. They labored in the cause of God. This grand thought exalted them above the influence of human weaknesses.

In proposing an ecclesiastical council, Lusignan had calculated upon the effect upon human nature of flattery and dissimulation. But here he found himself at fault, and thus deceived in his cherished hopes he marvelled greatly.

Nevertheless he did not despair. He was aware that the Archbishop of Nazareth and the Bishop of Bethlehem bitterly hated the Infidels, and that, next to William of Tyre, they were the most eloquent and influential among the fathers of the Church. Lusignan was most anxious that Richard should urge his wishes upon the English ecclesiastics; but he dared not propose such a measure to the honest-hearted king lest, in so doing, he should betray his own unscrupulous nature. But of Richard's brusque frankness he could more readily avail himself; and on more than one occasion he adroitly managed to have Matilda's brother publicly declare that a refusal to Saladin's proposition would be most satisfactory to him. Lusignan even induced Richard to urge forward the conclusion of the ses-

sion, fearing lest William's return, of which he had a vague presentiment, should be the signal of defeat to his own ambitious hopes.

At last dawned that eventful day upon which the momentous verdict would be proclaimed, and the existing truce be succeeded by peace or war.

Within twelve hours Matilda's fate would be irrevocably decided. Within twelve hours, and neither Malek Adhel nor the Archbishop of Tyre had yet appeared! The serene peace following a noble deed, which had possessed the heart of the princess, was now changed to anxiety and a vague alarm. But even as she had with an effort suppressed betrayal of her happy thoughts and sanguine hopes, so she now endeavored to conceal within her own breast the distracting forebodings which beset her. Never had her love for Malek Adhel seemed so intense as now when perhaps she would be commanded to renounce him forever.

How frequently a comparatively trifling grievance for a time overshadows a more serious trouble. The prize reserved for the last day's competition in the lists — the prize most coveted by the knights — was a miniature portrait of Matilda. The thought of bestowing it upon Lusignan was unendurable to her. She had gladly consented to sit for it, not doubting that Malek Adhel would obtain possession of a treasure so worthy of his endeavor.

Berengaria surprised her in the midst of her anxious thoughts. Under the pretext of conducting her to the tournament, she had come to offer sympathy and share

her trouble. She drew her sister to a low seat near her own, and Matilda, silently weeping, buried her face in the bosom of the gentle queen.

But a long indulgence in her grief was not allowed her. Her maids, reminding her of the lateness of the hour, urged her to assume an attire befitting the occasion. She repelled their advances, and resented with tears their attempt to confine with the tiara of gems her blonde hair. From time to time came Richard's imperious summons; vainly they informed her that his impatience was fast verging upon displeasure; she listened with indifference — dreading nothing save the ending of this anxious day. She seemed to retard her fate by deferring the opening of the tournament, and as it could not begin without her presence, she was resolved to appear at as late an hour as possible.

Finally all further excuses were exhausted; Richard would be denied no longer, and even Berengaria, with her ever-ready sympathy, admitted the inexpediency of further delay.

They carried her off, decked in all the pomp and magnificence of her high rank, a victim to the ordeal of gazing eyes and curious surmises. She turned away from the gay scene, the animated, happy faces around her, and took her accustomed seat near the queen; leaning her elbow upon the balustrade of the balcony, and supporting her cheek in her hand, she gazed intently, anxiously, toward the road leading to Cæsarea, whence only now might come to her peace, hope, and happiness.

Until this day Saladin had not participated in the sham battles. Accustomed to the more earnest scenes of warfare, he was little skilled in the warlike games of European chivalry, and had been unwilling to compromise the dignity of his rank by entering a contest which offered only either humiliating defeat or insignificant victory.

However, beholding his most valiant warriors always succumbing to Lusignan — that presumptuous king who dared even in his presence to assume his forfeited title of King of Jerusalem — seeing him, vain of the prizes he had won day after day, preparing likewise to grasp that which should belong only to Malek Adhel — the princess' portrait — Saladin could contain himself no longer. Rising from his throne he addressed Lusignan in loud, menacing tones:

"Wait, Lusignan; be not over-confident of another triumph. Perchance it belongs to me to wrest from you the honors of this day, as I have already done a kingdom whose empty title you still seem pleased to bear!"

Lusignan, intoxicated with victory, gazed arrogantly at the sultan.

"I accept your challenge right willingly, Saladin," he said; "your defeat will add another leaf to my laurels. Haste — the noise of your fall will but herald that of your throne and the ending of your usurpation."

Saladin, trembling with rage, betook himself to the arena.

The combatants met with a terrible shock. Their

evident animosity gave a more serious aspect to an encounter whose purpose was simply a friendly trial of arms. Their blunted steel for which, in accordance with the rules of the tournament, their habitual weapons had been exchanged, illy served the temper of the antagonists; and in default of their trenchant blades, they endeavored to give additional force to the blows they showered upon each other.

With intense interest the spectators watched their movements. Not a sound was heard save the clash of steel meeting steel, or the hoarse breathing of the fierce warriors. Even Matilda turned from her anxious watch in the direction of Cæsarea to follow the progress of the terrible contest. She dared not hope for Saladin's victory over a Christian knight, yet she was quite sure that Lusignan's defeat was her most anxious wish. Not all her courage, not all her submission could enable her willingly to bestow her portrait upon him.

For some time the chances seemed equally in favor of Crusader and Mussulman, and the fortune of the contest uncertain. But Lusignan, habituated to these warlike amusements, was acquainted with all their customary manœuvres, as well as with the art of reserving his powers for the moment when they would be most available. Saladin, on the contrary, had hitherto dealt only mortal blows, and these being precluded by the rules, as well as by the weapons, arranged for the lists, exhausted his powers without avail.

Lusignan took advantage of his opponent's imprudence. He wheeled around about him with dazzling

rapidity; he taunted, he irritated him; he warded off his blows and dealt his own in return, ere the sultan had time to recover his equilibrium and put himself upon his guard. He struck him upon the right while Saladin was levelling a blow to his left, where an instant before his foe had been harassing him. Then seizing a favorable moment when the sultan, raising his arm, prepared to deal him a ponderous blow, Lusignan faced about, wheeled rapidly behind him, caught him in the middle and threw him violently to the ground, with the triumphant cry:

"Down with the usurper!"

So adroit a *coup* was greeted with enthusiastic acclamations. Lusignan, with exultant bearing, was directing his steps as usual towards the queen's balcony to claim his reward, when the princess suddenly exclaimed:

"Behold one mightier than you!"

Scarcely had she spoken when Malek Adhel, covered with dust, and mounted on a horse wet with sweat and foam, rushed upon the scene. Like a thunderbolt he leapt the barrier, and beheld with horror his brother, the haughty Saladin, overthrown before Lusignan.

Lusignan, in dismay at this sudden apparition, concealed the rage and despair which possessed him, and addressed the prince in arrogant tones:

"You were in no haste, it seems, to verify your threats, O valiant Saracen! You come late to dispute my victory."

"I am here in time to wrest it from you," retorted Malek Adhel; "Saladin, I will avenge you!"

Indignant at his brother's humiliation, his arm was doubly nerved for the impending contest. He threw himself impetuously upon his enemy. Flash after flash playing about his weapon, followed each telling blow. He pressed his antagonist, he gave him no respite. Lusignan, astounded by the force and rapidity of his blows, became confused in his turn; he faltered, and almost before he had been able to strike, he seemed ready to succumb.

Malek Adhel perceived his condition and immediately suspended his attack.

"Recover yourself, Lusignan; I need not take advantage of a momentary weakness to conquer."

The generous act was one that could not but elicit the commendation of the spectators, and murmurs of approval were heard from all sides.

Lusignan, perceiving the moral triumph of his detested rival and fully aware that a victory at arms would shortly be added to it, gave full sway to his rage and despair. Since he must perforce yield his hard-won triumphs to his enemy's superior prowess, he resolved that he would not survive the humiliation. His death, under the circumstances, would forever tarnish the glory of the victor. He determined to die. Thus biassed by the promptings of his insane fury, he himself renewed the attack, and with such violence and rage that Malek Adhel for a moment wavered and recoiled, but his self-possession never for a moment abandoned him.

"Lusignan," he cried, "your defeat, I confess, is no child's play. I thought only to contend with a vain-

glorious rival, 'tis a hero to whose defeat I now aspire!"

As he spoke, like an electric flash he threw himself upon Lusignan and felled him to the ground.

"Accomplish your work" said the discomfited king; "rob me of life as you have already robbed me of my kingdom, and Matilda's heart."

"Nay, Lusignan," returned Malek Adhel kindly; "need one moment's misfortune blight the glory of a week's uninterrupted success? Can you not forgive me a victory which you have wrested from the great Saladin, and from all others who have ventured to measure swords with you?"

"And of what avail to me are past successes," cried Lusignan despairingly; "will not Matilda attribute them all to your absence! What miracle of the Evil One has brought you hither to-day to wrest from me the prize I most coveted — the miniature of my promised bride!"

"The portrait of Matilda — of her upon whom you have as little claim as upon the throne of Jerusalem!" exclaimed the Saracen prince; "I dreamed not of so sweet a guerdon awaiting me!"

With the same impetuosity with which he had overthrown his rival, he hastened to the princess' side. She had been following his every movement, thrilling with pride at his prowess; trembling, yet full of faith in him when, for one brief moment, he had faltered. She saw him coming to her now, and soft blushes suffused her fair face. while in her beaming eyes shone such

plenitude of love and gratitude and pride in him that one far less confident of her affection than he would have felt amply reassured.

With what exceeding joy the beautiful arms of the young princess encircled her lover's neck as she decorated him with her portrait, with what affectionate delay she clasped the chain from which the miniature hung, with what tender pride she thus endowed him before the eyes of all the assembled nations of the earth!

While on bended knee he received his reward, Malek Adhel contrived to say to her in tones inaudible save to herself:

"William will be here to-morrow, but ere his arrival, a word — but one, in Montmorency's tomb!"

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips when Richard approached and prevented further speech between his sister and a suitor whom he did not favor. Malek Adhel was presently encompassed by a throng of admiring or curious witnesses of his gallant deeds. They eagerly questioned him about the cause of his absence; he refused all explanation. But the momentary joy of victory had vanished from his careworn brow.

Soon a message arrived from Saladin who had retired to his tent, requesting his presence. Malek Adhel, excusing himself, obeyed the summons.

Lusignan in gloomy silence held aloof nursing his wrath, while bluff Richard took no pains to conceal the disappointment he felt. The discomfiture of his brother-in-arms revived the recollection of his own, and the thought of an alliance with him who had thus hu-

miliated them, became but the more repugnant to his haughty spirit.

An undercurrent of uncertainty and anxiety seemed to pervade the vast concourse of people, and Matilda was not the least occupied with agitating thoughts.

Malek Adhel had assured her that William would arrive on the morrow, and yet, the session of the ecclesiastical council would terminate this very evening. It rested with her to delay the final decision of the council, to announce the return of the archbishop. Should the verdict be favorable to Malek Adhel's suit, she needed William's approval ere she could confirm it with assent, should the prelates decide counter to her hopes, she should still require his paternal sympathy and counsel to enable her to bear her disappointment. So revolving the subject in her mind, she beckoned to Richard, who was standing a little apart conversing with Lusignan.

"Richard," she said, "the archbishop will be here to-morrow. Doubtless his high ecclesiastical rank and the renown for wisdom which he enjoys will not permit the council to decide without him, when but one day's delay will ensure his co-operation.

Lusignan, who had heard her words, looked appealingly at the king. Richard nodded reassuringly, then turning to his sister coldly demanded the source of her information.

"Prince Malek Adhel has just assured me," she answered, blushing, "that the archbishop is within one day's travel of Ptolemaïs."

"Surely Your Majesty will not interfere with the proceedings of the council!" Lusignan hastily interrupted.

Ere the King of England could reply, the Dukes of Burgundy, Austria, and Bavaria, and other princes and leaders who had gathered around during the discussion interposed with one voice, asserting that simple justice required that the council should be immediately informed of the approach of their venerable brother.

Lusignan attempted to oppose the measure; no one heeded him.

"Does it not seem to you, Brother," said Matilda, deferentially, "that a decision which affects me so nearly should be submitted to the wisdom of him who has hitherto directed my every thought and action? Send, I pray you, to the bishops to announce William's return."

"Please yourself," said Richard brusquely; "the matter interests you more than it does me. It has already given me too much annoyance not to cause me to regret having wasted so much thought upon it."

The princess did not await a more gracious consent, but hastened to despatch one of her pages to the pope's legate with the important tidings.

Shortly after, the doors opened to admit the reverend members of the council.

"Well, holy Fathers," cried Richard; "you have, it seems, suspended judgment?"

"The early return of William of Tyre and the desire

of the Princess Matilda, seem to us sufficient cause for postponing our decision another day," replied the Bishop of Nazareth.

Several times during the course of the evening, Matilda surprised the legate regarding her with a glance, an expression of tender pity; once, chancing to be beside her, he could not refrain from saying softly:

"My poor child, what have you done!"

Then he checked himself suddenly and turned away, leaving the princess a prey to most perplexing thoughts.

CHAPTER XV.

On leaving the princess Malek Adhel did not doubt that she would accede to his request, and the light of another day would witness their reunion in Montmorency's tomb.

The night was spent by Matilda in anxious harassing thought. Could she refuse the prayer of him who had yielded so much to her!

She recalled the services he had rendered, the sacrifices he had made in her behalf; was she not to him indebted for her own life, and her brother's? In obedience to her request had he not foregone a succession of brilliant victories over a detested rival, and returned in time to spare her the mortification of awarding to that rival a prize which of all others she was most reluctant to confer upon him?

"I will go!" she said to herself, endeavoring to smother the inner voice which pleaded against the impulse of a loving heart; "I have promised to refuse him nothing that virtue and religion did not forbid me to grant. Perhaps too, he needs my counsel, my encouragement, to nourish and fortify his new-born faith. Besides," she added, eagerly pursuing a train of encouraging reasoning, "it is quite necessary that I should inform myself of the archbishop's disposition in this important matter, and the effect of William's wise and eloquent arguments upon the mind of the prince, that I may foresee and perhaps give a more favorable turn to the opinion which he will lay before the council."

Refusing to deliberate further upon a foregone conclusion, the young princess sought a few hours repose.

In vain, she could not sleep upon a resolution her conscience disapproved.

The lagging hours, freighted with wearisome thoughts, passed slowly by, and no longer able to endure a state of physical quiescence while her mind was thus racked with a horrible uncertainty, she sprang from her bed and, hastily dressing herself, entered her oratory and opened the casement leading out upon the balcony. All was calm and tranquil without—all save the restless waves breaking against the rocks on the shore.

"Always troubled," she murmured; "yet less troubled than my spirit, craving rest yet finding it not!—O heavenly Father," she added, presently, "guide me aright. Love has blinded my reason, but my heart still holds Thee supreme!"

And after awhile, as though in answer to the cry of her distress, the voice of Religion was heard above the elements warring within that tempest-tossed heart—bidding them 'be still.' Then peace, such trustful, restful peace, shone upon it, making all clear that before had been wrapped in impenetrable gloom.

And now, as she paced the moonlit balcony, she could think calmly, dispassionately, she could bare to the scrutiny of her reason the mysteries of a heart no longer overshadowed.

"When in defiance of appearances, and my own instinct of maiden modesty," she said to herself, "I ventured to make a secret appointment with Malek Adhel, my conscience did not disapprove, for I believed that in sending him to seek the Archbishop of Tyre, I opened to him the means of salvation. I knew that I alone could induce him to make this sacrifice, and not a moment was to be lost. But a few days remained ere the termination of the session, within which time William was to be found and brought back and the conversion of the prince effected. I believed that to that end no moment could have been more favorable than that which seemed to unite in one blessed promise his fate, here and hereafter. But now, what excuse have I for defying the proprieties of life a second time? His wish? Alas! my God, that would suffice me—but would it hold good with Thee? If William has brought him into the light of the true faith, I shall know only a little later the blessed truth, without having to blush for the means through which I have learned it; if on the

other hand, notwithstanding the wisdom and eloquence of the archbishop, Malek Adhel should have persisted in his errors, how presumptuous would be the hope that my feeble voice could move him! Surely, if this meeting he asks of me is not sanctioned by necessity, I should be guilty in granting it. Therefore, whatever fate is reserved for me, I can only await it with meekness and submission. But oh, may the voice of God subdue that of Malek Adhel, which cries unto my heart and will not be silenced!"

She fell upon her knees, sobbing piteously at the thought of the bitter disappointment awaiting the man she loved.

Meanwhile, the night with its holy inspirations was merging into the light of day, the stars were fading one by one from the brightening skies; soon the crimson-liveried heralds of the Day-king would appear in the eastern horizon.

And Malek Adhel would obey their signal. Malek Adhel would be hastening full of joyful anticipation to the tryst he had asked of her, to find — only disappointment.

With the brightening light Matilda seemed to count the throbbings of her lover's anxious waiting heart, she felt her resolution waver. She would no longer trust herself to watch these slow-coming tokens of the pain her hand was dealing him she loved. She retired to her chamber, closing out the light — trying to escape from thought as well. But whether she would or no the passing moments had left their silent record behind.

When the morning was already far spent and the possibilities of weakness had passed from her reach, the princess quitted her retirement and, anxious to learn whether the archbishop had yet returned, sought the queen's apartments.

Berengaria kissed her affectionately.

"Sweet sister," she said, "a happy presentiment assures me that the days of your sorrow are at an end, and that with this one is inaugurated a life of ceaseless happiness."

"Happiness is much," replied the young girl, "but I have asked more than that of God."

"I doubt not that He will grant every aspiration of so pure a heart," said the queen fondly; "how propitious everything has been since yesterday! Malek Adhel suddenly appears, to obtain the most valued prize and the highest honors of the tournament, and this morning the Archbishop of Tyre arrives to cast the weight of his great influence in your favor . . . "

"The archbishop is here?" interrupted Matilda: "When did he arrive? Have you seen — have you spoken to him?"

"'Tis but an hour since he entered the city; since then he has been closeted with the legate."

At this news — so long expected, yet for which she was still so unprepared, the princess became violently agitated. Her heart throbbed, her knees refused support to her trembling frame, the color deserted her face. Berengaria hastened to her assistance.

"Doubt not a happy issue to the anxieties of this

day, she said tenderly. "But even should the council decide adversely, Matilda, you could never find courage to consent to a separation from Malek Adhel; see how prostrated you are, poor dove, at the bare suggestion of your anxious fears!"

"For the short pilgrimage of this life I could be strong and brave," the young girl answered, lifting her trustful eyes to heaven; "but for aye—always...!"

She shook her head, unable to say more, and buried her sobs and tears in Berengaria's bosom.

Just then the door opened and a page announced the approach of the king and the Archbishop of Tyre.

Matilda rose to leave, unwilling to betray to their scrutiny a grief she could not restrain. But ere she had crossed the room Richard had entered, followed by the archbishop. Dropping her eyes to the floor the princess saluted them, then resumed her seat in silence, without having ventured to question the countenance of the prelate to discover whether hope or disappointment would be her portion.

"Thrice welcome, Father," cried the queen; "what mischances have thus delayed your return? What good fortune has restored you to us so opportunely?"

"I was taken captive by the Infidels," replied the archbishop gravely; "arrested at Jaffa, where Metchoub is in command, by his order despite the existence of the truce, I was loaded down with chains and thrust into a dungeon, and the vindictive Metchoub ascribing to me a share in the capture of Ptolemaïs, took advantage of the supreme authority he exercises at Jaffa to order my ex-

ecution. Preparations to that effect were in progress, I had but one day more to live, and submissive to the dispensation of my Heavenly Father, without whose consent my enemies were powerless, I awaited the signal which should open to me eternal life. But in the middle of that night which I regarded as my last, my prison doors flew open. I believed my foes wished to anticipate the hour assigned for my death, and awaited them with a peace and faith gained from close communion with God. I waited — and in lieu of the scowling faces of my executioners, I beheld before me a warrior of noble face and mien — a liberator!"

An involuntary exclamation of joy escaped Matilda's lips.

"And this friend in need, who is he?" questioned Richard eagerly.

"Malek Adhel," said the archbishop, after a moment's silence; "I know not what fortuitous circumstance, or rather what divine miracle sent him to my rescue, when all things conspired to detain him here. He has persistently refused me all explanation on that point."

"This matter savors of some strange mystery," said Richard in offended tones; "it seems difficult to imagine how Malek Adhel could have been sent to you so opportunely, when only the queen and my sister were acquainted with the direction your steps had taken."

"If mystery there is," replied William, "'tis the mystery which our Saviour commands, when he bids us conceal from our right hand the good that our left hand

doeth; 'tis a mystery of generosity and self-sacrifice which I shall be most careful not to seek to penetrate with a profaning curiosity."

"Father," cried Richard brusquely, "you are singularly biassed in favor of Malek Adhel. All that he does, all that concerns his interests is excused or approved by you. I think there may be room to fear this prepossession for him may somewhat affect the integrity of your opinion in the verdict about to be pronounced."

"Sire," replied the archbishop, "I do not pretend to deny that Malek Adhel is very dear to me — almost as dear as a son. His noble qualities would extort this from me even though gratitude did not render it obligatory. I shall say before the council as I say here, all the good I know of Malek Adhel. Why should I conceal it? Does religion require us to be unjust toward her enemies? It is not permitted me to communicate to Your Majesty my intentions and plans, but I dare believe that in the sight of the Omniscient One, their purity will stand unimpeached."

With some confusion, Richard disclaimed all thought of suspecting the archbishop's integrity of purpose.

"And even if you have done so, Sire," replied William meekly, "should I have a right to complain? I am but a man — and all men are fallible. Whatever path man pursues in life, he leaves behind him traces of frailty and imperfection. Then since he is subject to error he should be submissive to suspicion."

After several moments of profound silence the queen

asked the prelate whether among the many qualities which had elicited his encomiums of Malek Adhel, he might number a willingness to abjure the errors of the creed of Mahomet.

At this question, which was one of such paramount importance to her, Matilda lifted her eager, imploring eyes to those of the archbishop. But he turned his face away from her anxious scrutiny, answering the queen that by satisfying her curiosity he would betray to her the opinion he was about to declare before the council, and this his duty forbade.

"Indeed, I shall retire instantly," he added, "in order to escape mutely eloquent solicitations, which I cannot but comprehend, but which duty forbids me to heed."

His glance fell with a more than wonted tenderness upon the young princess, and she perceived upon his furrowed brow traces of agitation and strong mental conflict.

With the affection he had openly avowed for Malek Adhel, would not tranquillity be the result of a decision in his favor?

The suffering of a lifetime seemed to the unhappy girl to be concentrated in the space of those few moments. She sat pale and motionless, seeing nothing but her misery, unconscious equally of the queen's loving caresses and of her brother's displeasure.

But Richard himself could not long witness her grief unmoved. He seated himself beside her and clasped her cold, moist hand tenderly in his own.

"Sister," he said, "my dear Matilda, how can your piety permit you to attach such moment to the fleeting joys of this life?"

Her answer was scarcely audible.

"'Tis not they which trouble me in this dark hour."

The king seemed surprised and puzzled at her reply. Berengaria, solving better than he the mysteries of that pious nature, kept silence.

Ere Richard could speak again a sound of contention was heard without, and the next moment a page hastily entered.

"Sire," he said, "the Saracen Prince, Malek Adhel, presented himself a moment since at the apartments of the Princess Matilda, requesting an audience of her. The King of Jerusalem chancing to pass by opposed his entrance and swore that only an express order from Your Majesty would induce him to permit it. The prince infuriated, drew his sword, Lusignan followed his example, and blood will flow unless Your Majesty deigns to come in person and appease this terrible quarrel."

Richard turned to his sister. A wondrous change had come over her. Two bright red spots burned in either cheek, her eyes were fairly dazzling with their luminous light, the hand he still retained was parched with fever.

"Strange being!" he exclaimed, rising to leave, "who would have suspected such strong feeling beneath so timid and gentle an exterior! — Madam," he added, addressing the queen, "excuse this foolish girl from

your presence, I would not wish to have others behold her thus."

Matilda arose as the king left the room.

"Richard is right," she said sorrowfully, "I am in no fitting state to be seen. Only God, should look upon me, only God can give me aid!"

"Retire into my oratory, then," said Berengaria kindly; "you will find there undisturbed seclusion, and from behind the intervening curtains you will be able to overhear all that passes in this room."

Thanking her gratefully for her thoughtful care, Matilda hastened to seek the shelter indicated. And not too soon, for the next moment Richard, followed by Malek Adhel and Lusignan, entered the room.

Upon entering the oratory the princess' first impulse was to kneel before the image of the dying Saviour; upon her pale lips trembled those words of agony so often repeated by God's suffering children since they first fell from lips Divine:

"'Father, if it be possible suffer this cup to pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt!'"

But presently the mute invocation repeated over and over again as the sole possible expression of her need, ceased to convey its eloquent import to her enthralled sense, the words died unspoken upon her lips. She was listening — listening as the oracle of her fate was being gradually unfolded, out beyond the shadows that enveloped her.

CHAPTER XVI.

In order that Matilda should lose nothing of the conversation which would ensue, Berengaria adroitly managed to exchange her seat for one close to the curtain which separated the apartment from her oratory. Malek Adhel was the first to come forward to salute the queen. In a low voice he implored her aid. Since daybreak, he told her, he had been harassed by the most torturing anxiety, vague presentiments of ill to her he loved had racked his tortured brain.

"Tell me, Your Majesty," he cried, "what evil has befallen the princess!"

Berengaria, at a loss to comprehend his strange speech, replied that all was well with her sister. But Malek Adhel still seemed bewildered and anxious. Again, and yet again, he inquired whether she was well, whether she was at liberty. The queen answered with the same unfailing patience and gentleness. He at last expressed himself content, yet, as he seated himself near her, he appeared more restless and unhappy than before.

"You will admit, Sire," exclaimed Lusignan, veiling his irony with ostensible courtesy, "that if aught could add to the reputation for charity which the Queen of England enjoys, it would be the condescending patience with which she has just listened to the incoherent ravings of yon Infidel."

But Richard took slight notice of Lusignan's in-

sidious speech. He was attentively regarding Malek Adhel.

Seated almost in the same spot where he had just seen his sister, pale and dejected like her, engrossed in the one thought which seemed to absorb all external sense of sight or hearing, Richard beheld him and involuntarily exclaimed aloud:

"Never saw I love like this!"

"What mean you, Sire?" asked Lusignan, with an angry glance.

"Ah, brother," said Richard, clasping his hand, "but for you this love-affair would move me strangely!"

"My Heavenly Father," murmured Matilda, "even the hearts of kings are as potter's clay in Thy hands. Ah, inspire Richard's with such love for Malek Adhel as he bears toward his unworthy friend!"

"Sire," retorted Lusignan coldly, withdrawing his hand from the king's cordial pressure, "I perceive full well that I must build my hopes solely upon the piety and justice of the council."

"And my justice, my piety, my vows particularly, do they count for nought then in your estimation?" Richard angrily interrupted.

Satisfied in his wish to arouse the king's quick temper that a succeeding repentance might bind him more firmly to his interests, Lusignan now feigned wounded affection.

"What matters it to me," he cried, "that honor renders your majesty's oath inviolable, since friendship no longer cements it!"

Richard's anger was appeased in a moment.

"You do me rank injustice, Lusignan. But why should we suffer such foolish bickerings to rise up between us? Come, these are the first harsh words that we have ever exchanged, let them be the last."

Honest-hearted Richard once more tendered his hand to his friend, then suddenly remembering the presence of others and annoyed that they should have witnessed a display of weakness on his part, he drew Lusignan a little apart to a windowed recess as though to engage him in private conversation.

Berengaria, bending toward Malek Adhel, murmured in his ear the joy she would experience to see him thus beloved by her husband.

"But yesterday," he replied, shaking his head despondently, "such tokens of friendship from one I so admire and esteem, would have aroused my keenest envy, to-day I have room only for one anxious thought —to see Matilda but for an instant, to say but one word to her!"

"Say it to me," quickly replied the queen; "I assure you it will not be lost to her."

"No, Madam," he replied; "she alone must hear me."

Berengaria looked towards the distant window where her husband and Lusignan were still conversing in low, earnest tones. Then she pointed to the curtain, saying hurriedly:

"I withdraw then; she alone will hear you."

He caught the meaning of her gesture, her words, and gave her a quick glance of joy and gratitude.

And now Malek Adhel would not have exchanged his seat for an emperor's throne.

"Matilda," he murmured softly, "do you hear me, do you listen to my prayer?"

A gentle motion of the curtain seemed to answer him; or was it but the effect of the passing breeze? He had no time to ascertain, for at the same moment Richard and Lusignan, quitting the window, began pacing the floor to and fro as they talked. He turned away his face as they approached him, lest it should betray the conscious joy reflected upon it. As they passed once more beyond hearing, he leaned towards the curtain again, saying in an undertone:

"I awaited you in vain this morning, and yet how urgent was my need to see you! If your opportunity to speak to the archbishop is past, we are lost!"

"My God," murmured the trembling girl, "I did what I deemed would best please Thee; shall I be punished as if for a fault!"

"Ah," exclaimed Richard, throwing open the blinds of a window looking towards the assembly rooms of the Hospitallers, where the council had been held, "the meeting is over; here are all the prelates, with the legate and William of Tyre at their head, coming hither to inform us of the result of their conference."

"My fate is then decided!" cried Lusignan.

"And mine!" added Malek Adhel hoarsely.

"And mine!" murmured the throbbing heart of the princess.

The legate and the archbishop entered the room.

"Sire," said the former, addressing the King of England, "yesterday the council had decided in favor of granting the hand of the Princess Matilda to a Mussulman prince; such would have been our verdict, had we not been compelled to adjourn the conference. But to-day the wise and eloquent counsels of the venerable Archbishop of Tyre have convinced us of the errors of our judgment; and we have pronounced a final and absolute refusal, except in the contingency of Malek Adhel's receiving, within three days, the sacrament of baptism, and taking oath never again to bear arms against us."

"And I take oath on the instant that I will subscribe to neither condition!" cried Malek Adhel coming forward excitedly: "think you it needs three days to decide me not to commit an act of the basest treachery!"

"Would it be one to forbear carrying arms against us?" asked the archbishop mildly; "the Christians ask only that."

"And so," Richard vehemently interrupted, "you refuse my sister's hand under the conditions offered you?"

"I refuse solely to betray the trust Saladin reposes in me! A being in whom are united the noblest attributes, human and divine, should not be the price of an ignoble action. *I* accept such dishonorable propositions! Never! Sooner will yon river unite with the

waters of the Red Sea, than I raise a sacrilegious hand against my brother and my country!"

"Revered Pontiff," said Lusignan, turning to William, "how far exalted you are above the rest of mankind; how unable are we to apprehend the marvellous rectitude of your nature! 'Tis to you, then, I owe more than my life—you whose influence with the council I so dreaded!"

"Sire," replied William gravely, "you owe me no thanks. I have served no creature, I have hearkened to no personal interests. Those of religion only were present before me. In this important matter I have considered only God and His rights."

"I confess that yesterday my opinion was contrary to that of the archbishop," said the legate; "and in the view I took of the matter, I believed I was conforming to the inclination of his Apostolic Holiness; for I was aware of the favorable effect which certain letters of Malek Adhel to Clement and to Alexander III. had produced upon the Holy See. But William of Tyre by his astute reasoning has convinced me differently..."

While he still continued speaking Malek Adhel, too preoccupied to listen, resumed his seat, and seemed once more absorbed in meditation. Watching his opportunity, he leaned toward the curtain again saying in tones inaudible to all save her for whom they were intended:

"Matilda, do you remember the promise you made me in the desert? Excepting the sacrifice of your innocence and your religion, you pledged yourself to

deny me nothing. The moment has come when I claim the fulfilment of that pledge. To-morrow you must meet me in Montmorency's tomb. I shall go there immediately; I shall remain until you come. If you fail me I shall still await you, if it is forever."

He could hear her quick breathing close beside him; but there was no reply.

"Matilda," he urged again, "will you violate your pledge? — Will you leave me there to die?"

"No," she answered at last.

He had no time to bless her for all the hope, the joy, that little word contained. The archbishop was approaching.

He paused before the queen.

"Where is the princess, Madam?" he inquired; "I was informed that I should find her here. I must see her — I must speak to her; I must reconcile her to a sacrifice which religion requires of her."

"Wait a little longer, Father," said Berengaria with some trepidation; "leave her a few moments more to an uncertainty less painful than the reality."

"When I explain to the princess the motives which have actuated me in this affair," said the archbishop, "I shall request Your Majesty to have the kindness to hear me also. She will perceive that the interests, the purity of our faith, would not permit us to accept the proposed alliance; she will perceive that to have yielded the Princess of England to a Mussulman husband would have been to expose the weakness of a young girl to the possibilities of apostasy . . ."

"You need have entertained no such fears," interrupted Malek Adhel; "I, who do not hold your belief, can assure you that her faith is above temptation. Besides, you have not forgotten my promises. No; your inflexible zeal could not resign itself to bend . . ."

"That zeal, whose object is God Himself, cannot, must not bend," interrupted William with some heat. "No, my son," he resumed, immediately regaining his usual serenity of spirit, "he is no Christian who fears to avow himself one; he is no Christian who prefers the opinion of his fellow-beings, human interests, and affections, before the glory of God!"

"Priest of the Christians' God," said Malek Adhel rising, "you have done me more harm this day than all other men united could do; yet there is not one on the face of the earth whom I honor as I do you. I trust neither of us will leave this world until a perfect reconciliation has been established between us."

He turned toward Richard, pride and pain struggling for the mastery.

"Sire," he said, "I am doubly unfortunate, both by the judgment which has just been pronounced, and the satisfaction it seems to have caused you. It appears to me that if you had vouchsafed some regret for my disappointment, it would have seemed less hard to bear; but I perceive only too well that everything here conspires against me, and that I must place my hopes elsewhere. —I leave you, Sire; I go to rejoin my brother, and acquaint him with the decision of the bishops. I foresee

that these tidings will herald the resumption of a bloody war, unless some unforeseen circumstance should intervene to prevent the misfortune."

All were surprised at Malek Adhel's moderation, and the control he maintained over his bitter disappointment. Lusignan, indeed, thought he perceived some hidden meaning beneath some expressions he had used, and suspected that ere his departure the prince would endeavor to exchange a word with Matilda. In order to defeat his purpose he resolved not to lose sight of his rival, and under the pretext of doing him honor, he proposed with the chief leaders of the army to escort him to the outer limits of the camp. Richard seized with unfeigned pleasure this opportunity to testify his esteem for the Saracen prince; and on their way he courteously expressed the pleasure an alliance with him would have afforded, had not a difference of faith and, more particularly, the inviolability of his oath to Lusignan, rendered it obligatory upon him to reject it.

Malek Adhel, confident that this alliance would yet be effected, appeared much moved by the king's courtesy, and the two men parted with every mark of a mutual cordiality of feeling.

Hastening to rejoin Saladin, Malek Adhel drew him aside.

"Do you know," he said, "on what conditions the Christians consent to grant me the hand of Richard's sister?"

"Upon those I have proposed to them, of course."

"No; they were not satisfied with your terms, and

unless I consent to embrace their faith, and desert your cause, they refuse to grant me the woman I love."

"Then you have renounced her," cried Saladin confidently.

"I have not renounced her — I shall not do so until this heart which enshrines her has ceased to beat!"

"What do I hear? Can an unworthy love have taught you to be base? Do I behold in my brother my bitterest enemy?"

"Do not soil your lips with a suspicion your heart does not confirm," interrupted Malek Adhel: "I am your brother, Saladin; how could I be at the same time your enemy? Listen, there is no time for deliberation. You will depart hence, of course. I shall not accompany you. I remain here. Fear not for me. I have found a retreat where the Christians will not discover me, the secret of which I cannot divulge even to you. However, I shall not tarry long. Await me at Cæsarea; within three days I shall rejoin you with my bride."

"With your bride!" cried Saladin astonished. "With the Princess of England?"

"With the Princess of England. Her heart is mine; her troth was long since given me. She will not betray her promise. No possible obstacle can intervene to defeat my projects. Take with you all your warriors, I need only Kaled. I know his courage and devoted attachment to me. They will serve my purpose well."

The sultan regarded his younger brother with eyes full of admiring affection.

"He who fears nothing, always triumphs!" he cried; "hasten then to the fulfilment of your destiny; bring to my court the beautiful lady of your love; proud will be the day when I can place the crown of Jerusalem upon the brow of Malek Adhel's bride."

"And this is the man they asked me to betray!" exclaimed Malek Adhel, throwing himself into his brother's arms.

Saladin and his suite set forth almost immediately for Cæsarea. Malek Adhel, accompanied only by his faithful Kaled, directed his steps toward the borders of the sea where a cluster of shelving rocks afforded a temporary security from observation. Here the prince bade Kaled remain in concealment, while two Arabian horses fed by his own hand, and obedient to his every signal of voice or gesture, were allowed to rove at will upon the neighboring hills.

Having concluded these preliminary arrangements, Malek Adhel now proceeded to the tomb of Montmorency, there to await the coming of Matilda, if, as he had told her, he must wait forever.

CHAPTER XVII.

No sooner had Malek Adhel withdrawn, than Matilda quitted the oratory and retired to the queen's cabinet into which it opened, to await the coming of the archbishop. There she endeavored to regain her usual self-control. In vain. Her mind seemed a prey to

an indescribable confusion. She could not reason, she could only think. Conflicting duties required obedience. In fulfilling the one, she must sin against the other. On one side, Malek Adhel's oath to die in Montmorency's tomb should she not come to him; on the other, the shame of a secret tryst with a Mussulman whom the united voices of the Church had forbidden her to love. On the one hand, the solemn pledge she had given in the desert, in the name of which the prince had preferred his request; on the other, a religion to which her first obligations belonged, and whose supreme authority had power to release her from those which opposed it. Should she consult the archbishop? If he should forbid her to accede to Malek Adhel's prayer, she was quite sure that she would not obey. Then it would be better not to mention the subject to him. Wherever she turned an abyss seemed opening before her. On all sides sin and sorrow. Nowhere happiness, or even peace.

This horrible mental conflict momentarily increased, and reflected upon the young girl's countenance an expression of bewilderment which caused the archbishop to shudder with alarm when he at length sought her.

He seated himself beside her, and silently took her hand in his own.

Never had any duty seemed so painful to him as that which he had just fulfilled — as that which yet lay before him.

"My daughter," he said after awhile, "are you prepared to hear me?"

"Speak, Father," she answered without lifting her heavy eyes.

"Child — child, you must accept the cup of bitterness God has apportioned you; you must accept it with resignation, even with gratitude. Remember that whom God loveth He chasteneth. Be thankful for the opportunity to offer Him so great a sacrifice."

"I do not murmur that He has required the resignation of my happiness; but if my submission is agreeable unto Him, may He accept the sacrifice of my life also."

"No, my child, He has demanded as a token of your obedience and love only your happiness; He leaves you life in order that each day may witness a renewal of your sacrifice. But listen to me, my child. I feel that I owe you an account of the circumstances which have influenced my decision; of the efforts I have made to gain Malek Adhel to the cause of Christ — and of their futility."

"And you bid me resign myself even to this dreadful misfortune!" the young girl exclaimed in tones of thrilling reproach.

"In the course of a long life, my child," said William with infinite gentleness, "I have seen much sorrow, I have witnessed the most frightful misfortunes, I have known trials too severe for human nature to endure save through Divine assistance, yet not a single case where resignation to the will of God was not a duty."

"But, Father, is resignation our whole duty? Are

there not some circumstances which require action? Are there not some instances when God's will and the demands of conscience seem no longer in accord, and when the very light He has bestowed upon us wherewith to discern right from wrong, seems to forbid us to obey His decrees?"

William gazed at her with a tender compassion.

"Oh, my child, this terrible ordeal cannot be the portion of one whose life has been so comparatively blameless as yours! . . ."

He would have said more, he would have won from the unhappy girl a complete avowal of her suffering, her bewildering doubts, when the door opened and Berengaria entered.

"Father," said the queen, "I avail myself of your permission to hear the recital you proposed making to my sister."

If the pious prelate had been capable of entertaining a sentiment of irritation or impatience, he would have experienced it at this moment, for he was fully aware of the importance of the avowal he had just missed, and the difficulty he would probably find in obtaining a second from one of Matilda's reserved nature.

However, accustomed as he was to behold the ruling hand of Providence in even the least event of life, he submitted to the disappointment, and after a moment's thought, began the promised recital.

"Upon my departure from Ptolemaïs," he said, "I went directly to Cæsarea. Some subaltern officers whom I met, mistaking me for a pilgrim, informed

me that Malek Adhel was no longer there, that he had just departed to visit Ascalon and Jaffa. I proceeded immediately to the former city, but again missed him. I followed him to Jaffa, and learned that he had not appeared there. In endeavoring to gain some information of his probable course, suspicions were aroused against me. I was recognized by Metchoub, who, as I this morning informed you, seized my person and pronounced sentence of death upon me. I have also told you by what miraculous chance Malek Adhel arrived to deliver me on the very day set for my execution. It was not the first time he had given me life and liberty. In Damascus as at Jaffa, but for him I should have pined away in a dungeon or died by torture. That generous prince always seems to cross my path to rescue me from peril, thereby increasing the obligation I owe to even the very least of God's creatures, to devote myself to his salvation. But the hour has not yet come, it seems. Perhaps Providence refuses to accept a conversion wrought through the influence of human affections, for He is a jealous as well as a merciful God. You may conceive, my children, that it needed not a sense of personal obligation to ensure my support in the interests of religion, but I must confess that gratitude rendered the ardor of my zeal more eager. I know not but sometimes when I spoke to Malek Adhel, the spirit of Divine inspiration was upon me. To God's glory, not to my glory I say it. — Never will my tongue again find such felicitous expression, such convincing argument. — He was touched at last, he could not hear

without acknowledging the Divine origin of that grand precept. 'Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that revile and persecute you.' His noble nature admitted in short, that that religion which developes in us the greatest number of virtues, is that in which the truth must exist."

"Malek Adhel is a Christian then," interrupted Matilda, eagerly, "my tears, my pain are forgotten. Though parted from him for this life, I may yet rejoice!"

"Alas, my child, of what avail is faith without works? The more enlightened Malek Adhel becomes, the greater his guilt. What pardon can there be for him who, seeing the light, refuses to follow it! What have I not done in order to convince him! Carried away by my zeal I even passed the bounds of my holy office, and promised much that the leaders of our army would perhaps have hesitated to ratify. I consented that in espousing the cause of Christianity, he should not bear arms against his country. My child, I humbled myself before him; on my knees, with tears I pleaded with him for the salvation of his soul — and he refused my prayer! He persisted that to accept the name of Christian would be to assume that of enemy to Saladin. Nevertheless, he assured me that you would be left entire liberty in the exercise of your faith, and that he himself would secretly worship your God. But had his new-born faith been secure, would he have feared to avow it before the world? Could I, relying upon a simple promise, consent that an Infidel should

reign in Jerusalem? Could I induce the Crusaders to restore to Mussulman rule Ptolemaïs, acquired by us at so heavy a cost? Could I, my child, by advocating this union, consent to expose you to exceeding danger? Once wedded to this Saracen, dazzled by his virtues, blinded by your love, pledged to obey him, your life would have been one continuous series of snares and temptations. Have you the presumption to think, knowing how difficult it is to preserve the immaculate purity of our faith when surrounded by the holiest examples, that you could have remained faithful in a situation where the virtue of saints, even of angels, might well fail? Consider the fearful position in which you would have been placed if some day Malek Adhel, overcome by Saladin's influence—an influence already so great as to have induced him wilfully to close his eyes to the light which had dawned upon him, to refuse your hand which he so ardently desired—if, overcome by Saladin's influence, I say, he had begun anew, to persecute the Christians, to shed the blood of your brothers. Between God and your husband, which would you have chosen?"

"Enough, Father," Matilda answered, "I was quite sure you would forbid me to wed a Mussulman, and I venture to assure you that had I been absolute mistress of my fate, my decision would have been the same."

"If you indeed possess a nature capable of such heroic resolves, my child," said the archbishop, deeply moved, "can you not gain from it also strength for their fulfilment? Why are you so downcast—so over-

come, in this hour when you should make every effort to be strong?"

Overcome indeed. Even while he was speaking, the young princess had fallen back in her chair unconscious of her misery.

For several hours she remained in a state which was not death with its utter insensibility, nor yet life with its teeming thought, a kind of stupor seemed to have enthralled her every sense, mental as well as physical.

But after awhile cares as cruel as they were tender, restored the wretched girl to all the sad realities of life. At nightfall she insisted upon returning to her apartments. Her resolution was formed.

She had decided to meet Malek Adhel on the morrow; but she had also decided to confide her plan to the archbishop. The presence of the queen had prevented her from doing so in the morning, but she determined to see him ere retiring to rest. She sent one of her pages to request the prelate's presence, but he did not come. Unwilling to relinquish the hope of his visit, she gave orders that her doors should not yet be closed for the night.

Finally her weary watching was rewarded, a voice outside requested permission to enter. She rose to admit her visitor, but instead of William, Richard appeared.

"Methinks you seem somewhat disappointed on seeing me, fair sister," he said, his smile belying the brusque manner of his address. "Nevertheless," he continued, "I will not grumble about it, for I feel in good humor to-night. Your deportment has well

pleased me. This day has been a lowering one, but thanks to the firmness of your nature and the strength springing from your ardent piety, you have been enabled to submit to a sacrifice whose extent I can appreciate. Another sacrifice of inclination to duty awaits you, Matilda, 'tis upon this important subject I have come to speak with you. It is no longer a question of submission to God, but one of rendering him active service. The war is about to be resumed. Saladin, angered by our rejection of his propositions, is preparing to fall upon us with all the forces at his command. Malek Adhel, still more embittered, will add to them the power of his invincible arm. The hope of wresting you from our midst will nerve his courage to almost superhuman exertions. That hope must not be left him, while a fresh incentive must be given our troops. Wearied of a protracted war, our European soldiers begin to murmur at hardships, dangers, and privations endured for the purpose of placing an Asiatic Christian upon the throne of Jerusalem. But with the assurance that a princess of my blood will share it with him every man of them will become a hero, the Saracens will meet with an opposition of which they do not dream, and defeated at every turn, will be compelled at last to relinquish Jerusalem so sacred from its associations to Christian hearts. There your high destiny calls you, Matilda, there a glorious duty awaits you — a duty which all Christendom will envy you — that of reviving and extending the empire of Christ upon earth. You have already apprehended my meaning. You perceive

that the interests of religion alone should suffice to gain your consent to a union with Lusignan. Not a moment is to be wasted. Within a few days we must proceed to Cæsarea, to Ascalon, to Jaffa, that through them we may gain access to Jerusalem. I can allow you but three days preparation for the august nuptials which all Christianity asks of you."

A deathly pallor had been gradually overspreading the countenance of the young girl; as he uttered the last decisive command, she looked up with wild alarm and then dropped her eyes to the ground and kept silence.

"You vouchsafe me no answer, Matilda," continued Richard, "your silence authorizes me, doubtless, to an interpretation consonant with my wishes and a sense of your duty. Perhaps the natural timidity of your sex and years prevents you from openly avowing your consent. But I will be satisfied with your obedience. I believe through the medium of kindly persuasion I have sufficiently convinced you of the necessity for submission, and that you will not compel me to resort to the authority of an indignant brother and an implacable king. You are aware that weaknesses of the heart are not permitted to a maiden of your rank, and that state reasons alone decide the destinies of those born near a throne. To conclude, Sister, you will not forget the patience and condescension which I have used towards you, nor reward them with an ingratitude that would lower you in my eyes and in those of the world."

The princess regarded Richard with some surprise and a faint smile flitted across her lips.

"'Tis in three days, then, my fate is to be decided?" she said, in tones so firm and quiet that the king greatly wondered. "I thank Your Majesty for having given me timely notice, and promise to be in readiness."

"Spoken like my own sister!" cried Richard exultantly, "your woman's courage does not belie that of Richard . . . "

"Sire," she interrupted, a faint flush mounting to her brow, "at such a time you will admit that I need solitary self-communings. It is near the reminders of mortality that we best learn to submit to necessary sacrifice. Will not Your Majesty consent to entrust to me, for this day only, the key to Montmorency's tomb?"

"Granted," said Richard tendering it to her, "but may this be the last time you seek in that gloomy spot a resignation your piety and strength of character should alone supply."

Nothing short of an emergency like the present, in which the very life of Malek Adhel was at stake, could have induced Matilda to ask this favor of Richard, and even under the circumstances, she might have hesitated at gaining it through artifice had not the thought of the horrible nuptials to which she was destined banished every scruple.

"I leave you to your reflections, Matilda," said Richard, rising, "may they influence you to receive with becoming graciousness a visit to-morrow from your betrothed husband."

"To-morrow?" she cried, "Your Majesty promised to grant me three days' grace!"

"In three days, certainly, you will become the wife of Lusignan, but before then, you will not refuse to listen to his wooing."

The princess coldly responded that she would prefer to be spared the annoyance, but that nevertheless, she would not refuse to receive whoever the king might see proper to bring to her. She rose as she spoke and anticipating Richard's intention, saluted him with deferential yet proud dignity. Richard smiled as he noticed the intimation thus conveyed, not displeased at an evidence of spirit which showed her so near akin to himself.

"You will see the Archbishop of Tyre, to-morrow," he said, "he will strengthen you in your good resolutions, his arguments will not be better than mine, but his eloquence will render them more effective."

"Think you, Sire, that the archbishop will approve this marriage?" cried Matilda anxiously.

"Can you doubt it? Has not the part he has taken in to-day's important proceedings convinced you of the inflexibility of his resolution where the interests of religion are involved? Prejudiced as he was in favor of Malek Adhel, he alone pronounced against him, and prejudiced as he is against Lusignan, 'tis yet he who will influence all minds, your own included, toward that ill-used king, and reconcile you to a marriage he deems indispensable to the cause of Christianity."

With these words Richard withdrew, leaving his sister in a state of the wildest excitement.

"No," she cried aloud, as she paced the floor with

rapid steps, "the archbishop shall not enter these doors! No, I will not listen to a word in favor of Lusignan — Detestable marriage, never will I consent to it! It was not enough to deny me to Malek Adhel, they must needs sacrifice me to his hated rival! And William would approve of this horrible tyranny! — No, I will not see William:— he shall not prevent me from saving Malek Adhel.— In trying to tighten the bonds of my slavery they have broken them! To-morrow — yes," she added decidedly, after a moment's pause, "to-morrow I will go to him, I will consult no one, nothing shall prevent me."

She called Hermione and gave orders that her doors should be closed for the night, and that no one, not even the Archbishop of Tyre, should be admitted. "At sunrise to-morrow," she added, "let my chariot be held in readiness to convey me to the tomb of Montmorency."

CHAPTER XVIII.

With the first rays of light, Hermione entered the princess' chamber to announce that all was in readiness for her departure.

Matilda opened her heavy eyes and endeavored to collect her wandering thoughts.

Gradually, one by one, the events of yesterday were recalled — those which must ensue to-day. Her first

thought was of her duty — and she hesitated; the second was of the proposed marriage with Lusignan — and she departed.

The chariot proceeded rapidly in the direction she had indicated. It reached the foot of the hill, and the young girl descended, and with nervous haste advanced toward the monument. She pushed open the door and entered, without having as usual paused to ask of God thought and aspirations suitable to the solemnity of the place.

So great was her agitation that she forgot all precaution, and neglected to close the door after her. Nor was Malek Adhel more prudent.

Matilda was his only thought. He hurried forward and caught her cold hands to his lips.

"Leave me," she cried, beside herself, "leave me."

Unable to sustain herself, she sought support beside the sarcophagus of Montmorency.

"My God," she sighed, "here all should be so peaceful:— peace belongs to the tomb, and yet my heart is the tomb of all my hopes, my happiness — but no peace is there! — Malek Adhel, why have you called me here? What do you desire of me? What misfortune have I yet to learn? What fresh struggle awaits me? Speak, reveal your intentions — your plans. It is time I should be informed of them, and that all this should come to an end!"

"Matilda," said the prince, surprised and alarmed for her, "I have never before beheld you in such a state,

never has such trouble been depicted upon your countenance. What is it that thus agitates you? Can you not calm yourself and listen to me?"

"He asks what thus agitates me," cried the princess, "and I am here! I am here in defiance of my brother, my duty, my God! But yesterday, the decrees of the Church pronounced eternal separation between my heart and that of the man I love, and to-day, all broken and tortured as it is, they order me to give it to the man I hate. To marry Lusignan in three days — this is what Richard commands me — what Heaven, perhaps, requires also. Horrible tyranny! My very soul revolts against it! Yet to escape my fearful fate what resource is left save to appeal to you for aid? Shameful resource, which will leave an ineffaceable stain upon my name! — That is not all. Death environs your footsteps. If you are discovered, a relentless rival will leave no means untried to accomplish your ruin.— I am with you whom my people have cause to hate, with you who have refused to recognize my God. I am here by my own will. I remain through my own weakness. My conscience cries out in bitter reproach, and I turn a deaf ear to its complaint — or if I hear its voice, 'tis but to be subjected to torments which bear no fruit. — This is my position, Malek Adhel, and you ask what troubles me! You ask me to be calm!"

"No," he cried impetuously, "now it is no longer calm I ask of you, but resolution. My beloved, let us deliberate no longer. The tyranny of your own people

has decided for you. All is ready: — you must fly with me. To-morrow you must return with me to Saladin's court."

"God forgive you the suggestion!" cried Matilda, involuntarily recoiling from him.

"Listen to me," he said, "I will not remind you of the marriage to which they would compel you, I will not urge upon you my own despair nor the deadly vengeance I should be sure to take upon your oppressors, in order to influence your decision. I will but recall to your remembrance the vows you pledged me in the desert; excepting the sacrifice of your faith and your innocence, you promised to refuse me nothing. Well, Matilda, I ask nothing of you which you may not grant. I only implore permission to protect you from oppression. Accept the shelter I offer you near an all-powerful monarch. There you shall reside in retirement as strict as you may desire. You shall be surrounded only by those whose society or attendance you may select. Even I will never enter your presence without permission. All the world shall know that my respect for you is equalled only by your immaculate purity. I will impose absolute silence upon my desires: I will refrain from importunity. I will urge you to share with me the throne of Jerusalem only when your brother's objections shall have been overcome, and the sanction of your Church obtained. In your retirement you shall be surrounded by Christians, you shall be at liberty to observe the duties of your religion, and if sometimes you deign to admit me to its ceremonies, I

will faithfully endeavor to lend my spirit to its articles of belief."

"Ah, if you had yielded consent to this ere now," interrupted Matilda, shedding bitter tears, "our happiness would have been secured. Instead of blushing for a tenderness I cannot banish from my heart, I should glory in it. Instead of fearing the eyes of Richard, of my people, of my God, I should bid them with pride behold my happiness!"

"Matilda, you are not unaware that Saladin contemns the religion of Christ. He has sworn to annihilate it. All who bear the name of Christian are his enemies. Should I assume this name? — Should I *become* my brother's enemy? For in acknowledging your faith, I should have wished to uphold it, in recognizing your God I should have felt compelled to defend his worship. Defend it! and against whom? What! In this fearful struggle about to be renewed, I would have remained neutral between two contending armies, beholding on one side my wife and my God, on the other my country and my brother! For the success of which should I pray? — No, offer me some alternative which does not involve treachery — profanation of the most sacred of ties human and Divine, and I will accept on the spot. You tremble. I have said enough. Yet listen once more: Should you go with me, should you by this decisive measure pronounce against the verdict of the council, those priests whose judgment was seduced by William's marvellous eloquence, will reconsider the matter dispassionately, and return to their previous

opinion. Won over, besides, by our patience, and deference to their decrees, they will consent to our union. The Crusaders, wearied of warfare, will be rejoiced to avail themselves of the opportunity offered of securing peace. The sacrificial blood will cease to flow, a reign of repose and prosperity will be inaugurated. You will ascend the throne of Jerusalem. You will reign supreme over this powerful empire, as over my heart. My will, my fate, will be in your hands to mould, to direct according to your own sweet pleasure. Seeing through your eyes, inspired by your own pure spirit, I shall learn to worship Him whom you worship, and one day, perhaps, our people — my brother himself, it may be — won by the proofs of your exalted virtues, will permit me openly to acknowledge your God; nay more, may like me, yield to the force of your example, and consent to a common worship! — Matilda," he added after a moment's silence, drawing from his bosom the reliquary she had given him in the desert, "if you do not swear to me upon this object of your pious veneration to be true to your vow and follow me, I will swear upon it not to survive your refusal."

Terrified, bewildered, almost convinced by the prince's arguments, more persuaded still by a threat she dared not doubt he would fulfil, the young girl clasped the reliquary in her trembling hands.

"My God," she cried, with uplifted eyes, "if I err, forgive me!"

Accepting the words as token of consent, he gave her no time to retract her implied promise.

"This, then, remains for you to do," he said quickly, "return to Ptolemaïs. Maintain a profound silence upon our plans, inform no one, neither the queen, nor the archbishop. To-morrow, at your usual early hour for taking the air beyond the city limits, order your chariot to proceed along the borders of the sea in the direction of Mount Carmel. You will not have passed the first cluster of rocks ere you will be saved. Ask not the means I shall employ. They will not fail you, and useless details would but waste precious moments. Leave me now, let us not by risking discovery, lose an eternity of bliss for the fleeting joy of the present moment."

"Malek Adhel — one word more!" pleaded the princess irresolutely.

"Not one," he answered, "you have entrusted your fate to my hands, there is nothing more to be said. Go, Matilda, and forget not that if to-morrow you failed me, to-morrow would witness my entrance into Ptolemaïs for the purpose of seeking the life of Lusignan — of your brother, perhaps, who knows? You would behold me overcome at last, fall beneath the blows of their myrmidons, done to death less from the effect of their will than of my own."

While he spoke, he led her toward the entrance, supporting her faltering footsteps with tender care. Suddenly a shadow fell upon their path through the half-open door. The Archbishop of Tyre stood upon the threshold. He saw, he recognized them, and a loud cry of horror escaped him.

Matilda now thought only of the peril of him she loved. She rushed toward the archbishop.

"Father," she said hoarsely, "be on your guard! A word may be his death-warrant! Come, let us go hence, my guards alarmed by your voice, might come and surprise him.— Farewell, Malek Adhel!"

She drew William outside the tomb, carefully closing the door after her. It was not too soon. Her guards, as she had foreseen, hearing the archbishop's startled cry, had hastened to his assistance.

"It is nothing," the princess said to them, with forced composure, "the Archbishop of Tyre, on entering Montmorency's tomb, fancied some great misfortune had overtaken me. He was mistaken," she added, her truthful eyes meeting his own, fully and fearlessly.

The venerable face of the archbishop colored beneath her reproachful glance. He had dared for an instant to suspect one pure as God's holy angels. Nevertheless, though reassured for the present, this secret tryst, this mutual understanding between Matilda and the prince, caused him infinite anxiety for the future. While he possessed entire confidence in the active qualities which distinguished the pure spirit of the young girl, he feared much from the influence of one so beloved, so worthy of her love as Malek Adhel, upon the more passive ones which belonged to her youth and trusting nature.

Revolving the subject in his mind, he decided upon a course which under less urgent necessity he would not have adopted. Words might leave behind but a tran-

sient influence — passing perhaps with the very sound of the voice which had conveyed them. He would picture to her mind's eye a scene whose lesson neither time nor any effort of the human will could ever efface.

"It is early still," he said, as the princess was about to enter her chariot which awaited her at the foot of the hill; "before returning to Ptolemaïs I would beg Your Highness to accompany me to one of the hovels just beneath yon beetling rock."

"Willingly, Father; yet what motive can prompt the request at such a time as this?" she replied, attributing to him a desire to engage her interest in some object of charity.

"My motive is that you may measure with your own eye the abysmal depths into which uncontrolled passions beguile the unwary, and how a justly-incensed God punishes those who fall into them."

She understood the warning thus conveyed, and humbly submitted to his will.

On arriving within a short distance of the cabin, William quitted the chariot with the princess and conducted her into an enclosure surrounded by a hedge of wild citron-trees. In its midst was a wretched hovel, the abode evidently of misery and gloom. An old woman sat spinning on a wooden bench beside the door; on either side of her two young girls were making baskets of braided osier.

Upon seeing the archbishop they arose, saluting him with respectful deference. William spoke a few kindly

words and passed on, while Matilda, trembling with a vague sense of alarm, followed him in silence.

They advanced towards a gloomy recess, formed by overhanging rocks, at the extreme end of the enclosure.

Suddenly a wild, unearthly shriek rent the air; the heart of the young princess stood still with fear. The next moment she perceived a pale, haggard, dishevelled woman, prostrate upon the ground, beating her breast and uttering wails, such as those she had just heard, of mortal agony.

"It is Agnes!" whispered the princess, nervously tightening her hands upon the archbishop's arm.

"In the days of her virtue," said William severely, "Agnes was as beautiful as yourself. She, too, was the glory of her people, the pride of her kindred. But a guilty passion overcame her sense of duty; and now, a faded beauty, a tarnished fame, an alienated intellect — are all that remains of Amaury's once envied daughter. . ."

He was interrupted by a renewal of the piercing shrieks which for a moment had been subdued into a fainter utterance of sobs and moans.

"Malek Adhel!" cried the piteous voice, "Malek Adhel!" it repeated incessantly.

"I can no longer endure this fearful scene," exclaimed the young princess terrified; "oh, Father, take me away!"

"No, no," cried the shrill voice of the maniac, as she sprang to her feet and assumed an attitude of rapt attention; "bring her to me, Malek Adhel; she

has stolen your heart from me; she has denied her God! Let me exult in her misery; let me taunt her, as she would have taunted me had she dared!"

She ceased; her ideas became more and more vague and confused; other images presented themselves before her; other phantoms came to remind her of her crimes. Her bloodshot eyes gazed with fierce, unsatisfied longing about her. Her cries recommenced:

"Malek Adhel! — Malek Adhel!"

"Come, now," said the archbishop to Matilda, as he perceived the deathly whiteness of her face; "you have borne enough."

He conducted her to the cabin, and, seating her upon the bench near the door, sent one of the young girls for a cup of cold water. The princess drank it with an effort; but the refreshing draught revived her. When William observed the color returning to her face, he rose to depart.

"Do not neglect my instructions," he said to the old woman, who was evidently in charge of the wretched Agnes; "should you observe the slightest change in your patient, if the faintest glimmer of reason should return, send for me; be it day, or night, I will come."

He dropped some coin in her hand as he spoke, and extended his own, in pastoral blessing, above the bowed heads of the cottagers. Then he signed to the princess that he was ready to go, and together they quitted the mournful place.

Since they had left Agnes, Matilda had not spoken.

Uneasy at her long silence, her haggard looks, the archbishop addressed her:

"My child, this has been a fearful lesson to you, but has it been an unnecessary one? Will it prove useless?"

The young girl still silent, walked beside him, with downcast eyes.

"A man's seductions, Matilda, caused Agnes' fall. You were not ignorant of the fact; yet it was with this man I found you just now. And where? In a place sanctified by death! Had its solemn associations no voice of warning to you?"

He paused, awaiting her answer.

"Father," she said at last, speaking with visible effort, "bear with me a little — I am very weak!"

He saw, indeed, that it was best to proceed no further for the present. He lifted her with tender care into the chariot, which they had now reached, and seated himself beside her. Willing to divert, yet not altogether to withdraw, her thoughts from the salutary channel into which he had impelled them, the archbishop presently resumed:

"Would it interest you to learn by what gradual degrees Agnes has reached the wretched state in which you have just seen her?"

The princess, raising her eyes, made a feeble gesture of assent.

"After her escape from Damietta," said the archbishop, "Agnes took refuge with Saladin; and spared no effort to inflame his anger against his brother. It

was she who, pursuing you with relentless hatred and jealousy, attacked the escort of knights who were bringing you back to us. It was she who beguiled the intrepid Montmorency into a snare; and when he found himself surrounded by the numerous Infidel soldiers she had brought with her, it was she, again, who dealt him death. Since then, disguised as a Mussulman slave, she has followed Malek Adhel. She pursued him to Cæsarea. He refused to see her. Shortly afterwards she gained knowledge of the embassy sent to the Christians to ask your hand in marriage for Saladin's brother. Her strength succumbed to the fatigues, the griefs, the insults she had experienced. Her mind gave way. I will not sully your pure ears with a description of the state in which I discovered her during my last visit to Cæsarea. I should blush, I confess, in attempting to convey an idea of the depths of degradation into which crime had plunged this daughter of kings. I desired to rescue — to save her, if possible. There was no one to deny her to me; no one who interested himself in the wretched creature's fate. I sent her, by means I could trust, to yon secluded cottage, where I can more conveniently watch over her necessities, and be at hand should God, in His great mercy, restore her mind to a state of reason sufficient to receive those precious seeds of religion which bear the blessed fruition of repentance and pardon. Until now no glimmer of hope has come to reward my efforts. She comprehends nothing; she recognizes no one. Malek Adhel is her sole thought — Malek Adhel, the author of her ruin!"

The princess had listened with silent interest during the recital of Agnes' sad story, but at the archbishop's last words, her head drooped upon her breast with an expression of weariness and pain.

"My child, have you nothing to say to me?" William asked after a long silence.

"Not yet, Father," she answered faintly: "there is a strange confusion in my mind, and my spirit is cruelly oppressed. But two days hence, at this same hour, in a place I shall hereafter indicate, I will unveil my heart to you. I will offer to God the incense of a sincere repentance, and perchance you may not deem me unworthy the grace of your absolving benediction."

The archbishop insisted no further, but his thoughts were busy with unfruitful surmises. There was evidently some hidden meaning in her words. In two days, she had said, and it was in two days that Richard had commanded the consummation of her nuptials with Lusignan. She was acquainted with this fact, he knew, for Richard had quitted his side the evening before to talk with her on the subject. Could it be possible that she had consented to the union?

"My daughter," he said, "you are aware that Richard commands you in two days to give your hand to Lusignan. Are you prepared to obey?"

"And you, Father, are you prepared to counsel me to do so?" she interrupted earnestly. Then, without giving him time to reply, she continued, raising her clasped hands towards him with a gesture of entreaty: "Father, I implore you, question me no further.

My fate is sealed. It is, Father, I am quite sure; for there are souls so magnanimous that nothing is impossible to them. Nevertheless, be not alarmed at my words. My fate is sealed, indeed, but that fate will be sanctified by God's approving smile."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE princess had gained but a few hours of much-needed rest, when a message arrived from Richard bidding her be in readiness to receive a visit from himself and Lusignan.

"And now I must learn to dissimulate," mused Matilda; "dissimulation is the language of the world, may I not make use of it for once ere I leave that world forever! To-morrow I shall have nothing to conceal—nothing to expect. Oh, Heavenly Father, sustain my courage. I mistrust myself only. I trust Malek Adhel entirely, and I dare call Thee to witness that my confidence is not misplaced!"

While she mused, she seated herself before her secretary and began to write. From her depression, and the patient resignation which soon replaced it, one would have supposed her absorbed in the solemn duty of transcribing her last testamentary wishes.

She was still occupied with her task when Richard entered with Lusignan.

She closed her desk and arose, proud and self-contained, to receive her visitors.

"Ah, Madam," cried Lusignan, coming forward with eager haste, "can so much happiness be my portion? Can it be true that you have consented to be mine? Nay, my presumption cannot soar so high, unless, indeed, you yourself bid me venture to hope!"

"It would seem that you had already ventured as much, Sire, since you are here," Matilda answered coldly; "had you been sure of a refusal, you would probably not have been here to receive it. — Richard," she added, "you have given me two days in which to prepare for my fate. I ask no more; but may I not spend that short space of time alone?"

Lusignan hastened to anticipate the king's reply.

"You shall have entire liberty, Madam," he said "to dispose of your time. I would not reward your acquiescence to my suit with importunity. During the two long days which separate me from the happiest one of my life, I shall not intrude upon your privacy. I would rather be deprived of the pleasure of seeing you, than to owe it solely to your obedience."

He saluted her and withdrew.

Then Richard, with evident displeasure, turned to his sister.

"I begin to weary," he said, "of ambiguous replies and eternal mysteries. Ever since your return to the camp, the Crusaders have been more occupied with your love affairs than with the important cause which has separated them from their families and homes. Has Europe poured forth her countless hosts into the bosom of distant Asia but to witness the weakness and vacilla-

tion of a romantic girl! It is time that this should come to an end, and that other thoughts should occupy the minds of our warriors. The day after to-morrow, Matilda, you will wed Lusignan; the day following your husband will accompany me to Cæsarea. We will lay siege to and capture that stronghold. Lusignan will triumph over Malek Adhel, and prove to you his superiority over the Infidel prince. You are now fully acquainted with my will. You know me too well to hope that I will relent. If you should ask the delay of an hour, you would ask it in vain. Your happiness is certainly dear to me, but far less so than the success of our campaign and the triumph of our cause. Prepare yourself for submission; yet, submissive or not, you will none the less be the wife of Lusignan in two days."

Without awaiting a reply, he turned on his heel and went out. But Richard's threat produced no effect upon his hearer. Before he had spoken Matilda's plans had been formed; notwithstanding her brother's imperious will, they still remained unchanged.

At sunrise next morning the princess left Ptolemaïs for her accustomed drive, taking the road which wound close along the borders of the sea. She was pale and her countenance bore traces of tears, but it had regained the tranquillity and peace of other days; while to the habitual grace of her bearing was added a firmness and dignity suggestive of mental conflict and self-conquest.

God's angels might well have smiled upon the girl —pure of heart, innocent of evil, as she had been; but

God Himself must approve the woman who, tried as by fire, had come forth without blemish.

As the princess perceived in the distance the first cluster of rocks towards Mount Carmel, a delicate flush suffused her face, and her hand unconsciously pressed her heart, as though to still its throbbing. The chariot rolled rapidly on; it gained, it reached the spot indicated by Malek Adhel. Suddenly two warriors in full armor rushed towards the princess. The guards endeavored to close around her. Malek Adhel, raising his visor, boldly advanced into their midst. At the sight of the renowned warrior, the soldiers stood as though spellbound; then Matilda, taking advantage of the propitious moment, addressed her people.

"Christians," she said, "do not attempt a resistance which would prove futile. If Malek Adhel is here, it is because I have chosen to grant to him only the right to save me from an arbitrary power which would have compelled me to nuptials from the very thought of which I shrink with horror. Prince," she added turning to Malek Adhel, "I promised to meet you here. I have kept my word. I promised to fly with you. I am ready to do so. But do not forget your pledge. In the retreat to which I go, I shall be at liberty to live a life of entire seclusion; I shall see no one, not even yourself; and I shall be allowed to observe my religious duties without hindrance?"

"Even so, Madam," replied the prince; "here in the sight of heaven, in the presence of your people, I renew my vow. You shall be obeyed and honored at the

court of Saladin as much as, aye, far more than at your royal brother's. Come, let us not waste moments so precious."

"One word more," said Matilda: "shall I be permitted to select my place of retreat?"

"You can decide better when we have reached Cæsarea," he answered, wondering at her request.

"No, Malek Adhel; I wish to make my choice here."

"Then have your will, Your Highness. I am ready to obey."

"Then conduct me there," she said, indicating with lifted hand the monastery which crowned the summit of Mount Carmel; "for there only could I live in uninterrupted seclusion, seeing no one, not even yourself; there only could I observe my religious duties without hindrance."

"Matilda, you have deceived me," he cried indignantly.

"No, I have not deceived you; for you are dearer to me than all other beings upon God's earth. If man alone interfered between us, I would brave all things for your sake. But the hand which snatches me from your love, oh Malek Adhel, is stronger than that of man or of kings. Have patience with me yet a little while," she added, gazing at him with her serene eyes. "By following you, Malek Adhel, I cast upon my fair fame an ineffaceable stain; I become an object of contempt to my people, for they could never hold me innocent. A name above reproach was the only treasure I reserved to myself when I yielded you my

love; in consenting to your demand, I consent to behold its glory departed forever... And yet..." she paused a moment in thought, then added: "I will prove my love and trust in you, Malek Adhel; I leave you sole arbiter of my fate. I give you all, that I may owe you all. If you resign me to the shelter of yonder sacred retreat, I shall live there honored of men, in peace with Heaven. If, on the other hand, you insist upon taking me to the court of Saladin, disgrace will attend my footsteps, and remorse be my constant companion. Such are the alternatives that lie before me; I leave you to choose for me. I leave in your hands my life, my honor, my eternal state. Decide, Malek Adhel!"

In plenitude of faith she awaited his answer. It did not come in words.

He sprang into the princess' chariot, and seizing the reins in his own hands, turned the horses' heads in the direction of the convent. Never had Malek Adhel appeared to Matilda so truly great as at this moment. She dared not trust herself to speak; but her hand sought her lover's with a clinging tenderness which reassured and strengthened him for the sacrifice he was making.

Meanwhile the chariot began the ascent of Mount Carmel. The female attendants of the princess, with her guards of honor, followed, marvelling greatly. Kaled closed the cortége.

Ere long, amid the thick growth of cedar which surrounded it, the ancient edifice, erected by the pious Helena, mother of Constantine, became visible.

Malek Adhel's face grew white and rigid.

"I have obeyed yon, Matilda," he said huskily, "nor do I repent; your happiness, your well-being, are far dearer to me than my own. Still, in leaving you here, I do not feel over-confident of having secured them. Yon cloister is on Christian territory, it is within the jurisdiction of your people; they will wrest you from its sheltering roof, and compel you to submit to their cruel tyranny!"

"No," she answered, "fear nothing; in being generous, you have also been wise. Here, religion will defend me more surely against the Christians, than could have done your strongest walls — your invincible courage itself. The unbarred doors of that sacred edifice are proof against my brother's ire, as against the united efforts of the entire Christian army. It is the house of God; to violate its privacy would be a sacrilege."

"One word more, Matilda; perhaps in the enthusiasm of your piety, you may imagine my conversion could be purchased by a great sacrifice — that self-immolation . . ."

"Doubtless," she interrupted, with beaming eyes; "and has not the sacrifice been consummated to-day?"

"Promise me then to be content with this. Promise that you will not assume the fearful, the indissoluble vows of the cloister, without my consent. — Perhaps I may give it you some day, my beloved," he added, regarding her with mournful intentness. "War with all its horrors is once more alight throughout the land. Saladin calls me; but I feel that my arm will be weak when

opposed to your brethren. I shall think less of my safety than of theirs. And there is one event, Matilda, which would make me wish that you should renounce the world."

The young girl understood his meaning, and burst into tears.

Meanwhile the road had become more and more narrow; the jutting rocks and the thick undergrowth and roots of trees interfered with the progress of the chariot. The princess alighted. Then, turning to her guards, she said:

"I request you to accompany me to the grounds of the convent. I wish you to be able to testify to my brother whose authority I have exchanged for his. And you," she added, addressing her women, "should you desire to retire with me to a life of self-sacrifice and prayer, come. Otherwise, avoid further fatigue, and await here the return of my escort."

With one accord they begged permission to accompany their idolized mistress, to remain with her forever. Much moved, she granted their request. Then in silence — for only silence can express such a farewell — she took Malek Adhel's hand.

"No," he cried; "think not I will leave you, while I have a moment to behold you!"

"Oh, Malek Adhel, do you forget that you are upon dangerous ground? that a thousand deaths environ you?"

"What are they to the joy of being beside you! Come," he added, taking her in his arms, "come, that

once more I may save your tender feet from the stone-strewn ground, once more shelter you from the burning heat of the day! — Oh, happy day, when she first called me beloved! Happy day, when death was about to sanctify the bond of a mutual love! Could I have believed then that another day of gloom would come, when I should call *thee* happy! Then my beloved did not send me from her; then she was not obdurate as now; then... O Matilda, how your heart has changed!"

"Changed! Ah, Malek Adhel, could you realize all that I have undergone — the reproaches of my people — of my conscience; the influence of those whose wisdom has been my guide through life; even, it has sometimes seemed to me, the voice of a forbidding God; you would partially appreciate the power of a love which has resisted them all, growing firmer with opposition, tenderer through denial. Oh, Malek Adhel, perhaps consideration of my own personal good, here and hereafter, would not have weighed with me against my love; but to save you a blessed immortality, I am strong for sacrifice. To guide you towards the source of Infinite Love, I must keep my own pure and clear as the stars of heaven!"

He clasped her passionately to his heart, subdued once more to her gentle will.

They had now emerged from the dense forest-growth. The monastery was fully disclosed to view; a rude wooden cross indicated the entrance to the enclosure, and the sound of human voices, singing the

canticles of the church, mingled with the notes of the solemn-toned bells.

The young girl, seized with pious awe, recoiled from her lover's arms.

"Forgive me, O Heavenly Father," she cried; "it is not thus I should approach Thy tabernacle!"

She knelt meekly at the foot of the cross. Her women and her guards followed her example. Malek Adhel and his friend alone remained standing. Matilda sighed as she saw them thus apart, and her lips moved in accord with the chief aspiration of her pure heart.

She arose presently, her strength renewed by her silent prayer, and supporting herself with twining arms against the sacred emblem, she gazed with yearning, yet resolute eyes, at Malek Adhel.

"Leave me now," she said to him; "you must come no further. Christians only may enter these sacred precincts. Farewell — a long farewell! And, O Malek Adhel, remember that earthly affections, earthly happiness, end there;" she pointed towards the little cemetery through which she must pass to reach the monastery; "but there is another place where love and happiness are eternal." She pointed heavenward now, a radiant smile breaking through her tears.

Then, without venturing to look at him again, she turned and walked rapidly away. At the entrance of the cloister she paused, secure of herself.

She beheld Malek Adhel standing on the spot she had just quitted, his arms around the cross, his yearning

gaze directed towards her, and seemed to discern in the sight an omen of promise.

"O Christ," she cried, "finish the work Thou hast begun within him!"

She extended one hand towards Malek Adhel, raised it slowly, pointing heavenward, and then disappeared behind the impenetrable gratings of the cloister.

Life and light seemed to vanish with her. Malek Adhel fell, overcome, at the foot of the cross. Kaled approached.

"Do you forget, Prince, upon what dangerous ground we stand?" he said; "and that every moment robs us of our chances of safety?"

"Go, Kaled, go: I care nothing for life deprived of her. Let my enemies find me here; at least I will die near her I love!"

"Then," said Kaled coldly, "I shall remain. I have joined my fate with yours. If you choose an inglorious death, I must submit to share it with you."

He seated himself calmly beside his prince. Malek Adhel knew the unswerving fidelity of his friend; he knew, too, that neither words, prayers, nor threats, could move him from the resolution he had taken. He rose.

"Come then, Kaled," he said gloomily, "I have sacrificed the happiness of life to her, I must now sacrifice the peace of death to you."

They walked rapidly away, and entering the thicket once more, Malek Adhel uttered a long, peculiar cry, somewhat resembling the note of a bird of prey;

presently the sound of steps swiftly approaching over the rocky pathway was heard, and through the tangled brush, the two beautiful Arabian horses of the prince appeared in answer to his call. The warriors hastily mounted, and clearing the forest, rapidly left the monastery in the distance.

A few hours later they reached Cæsarea.

Saladin was impatiently awaiting them. The duties of his position called him elsewhere; yet he would place the defence of so important a stronghold in no other hands than those of Malek Adhel.

"I do not ask you, Brother," he said, "the cause of your evident disappointment. Other thoughts than those of love should engage our attention to-day. I go to place Ascalon in preparation for a state of siege — a useless precaution, perhaps, for the Christians will not direct their efforts there so long as Cæsarea stands. I leave Cæsarea under your protection; therefore Cæsarea is invincible."

CHAPTER XX.

THE day was far advanced when Matilda's guard of honor re-entered Ptolemaïs. They found the camp in a state of confusion; Lusignan in despair, Richard beside himself with rage, and the queen and the archbishop overwhelmed with grief and alarm.

Matilda's prolonged absence during the earlier hours of the morning had caused some anxiety in

the household. Towards mid-day, Berengaria, seeking some clue to a mystery which was now becoming alarming, entered her sister's rooms. Upon her secretary she discovered a note addressed to Richard. She seized it eagerly, surmising a more serious calamity than even those her fears had suggested. She dared not be the bearer of evil tidings to Richard, but hastened to despatch a page to the archbishop, requesting his presence.

The queen silently placed the missive in William's hand.

The last doubt was at an end. Matilda had gone of her own free-will — gone premeditately — gone, concealing her disgraceful flight by means of dissimulation and artifice. A sigh escaped the old man's heavy heart.

"Oh, that my Divine Master had permitted me to depart ere I had lived to see this day," he cried.

"Give it to Richard, I pray you, Father," said the queen, "I dare not."

He accepted the painful duty without a murmur, and went instantly to Richard.

The king, pale with anger and alarm, tore open the letter.

"I leave Ptolemaïs," it ran, "in order to escape an authority which has passed the bounds of justice, and a marriage repugnant to me beyond expression. I know my brother too well to dare expect his forgiveness for a while at least, but of that of Him who reads my heart and beholds the purity of its intentions, I am assured."

"She is right," cried Richard, "I will not, I shall never forgive her!"

The archbishop would have interposed.

"No," he said, "such conduct is without excuse. Whoever would attempt to justify her, would be as guilty as she."

He rushed from the room in a paroxysm of wrath to give orders that troops should be sent in all directions in pursuit of the fugitive princess.

William raised the paper from the floor where Richard had hurled it; smoothed out its crushed folds and perused its contents.

As he read, his brow grew calm and placid as of yore.

"She assures us of God's countenance," he murmured, "then my tender lamb is not lost from the fold!"

The day was drawing to a close and Richard's emissaries had not returned. But at sunset the princess' guards entered the city, and shortly after Matilda's interview with Malek Adhel, and her retirement to the cloister of Mount Carmel, were known throughout Ptolemaïs. .

Some admired the resolution of the young girl, who, refusing happiness and a throne which religion forbade her accepting, had preferred the privations and obscurity of a convent, others more lenient still, would have held her excusable had she herself accepted the propositions of Saladin which the council had refused for her, and flying from a repulsive marriage, sought protection with a husband she loved. But the friends of Richard and Lusignan condemned her still clinging to her love for

an Infidel, and refusing to submit to a marriage which the interests of the Church required of her.

Richard, indignant at the commotion the event had created throughout the army and the influence which a woman's love-affair exerted among his warriors, declared his intention of exercising his authority as brother and king and going the day following to the convent to demand his sister and compel her to an immediate marriage with Lusignan.

"Your Majesty will not forget," said William firmly, "that there is a power superior to your own. God cannot be insulted with impunity: His house shall not be profaned. Nevertheless, I say with you, let the fate of the Princess of England be no longer a subject of such moment among us. Valiant warriors, noble knights, I bid you forget her! Was it for her sake you girded on your swords and took up the symbol of redemption? Was it for the guerdon of her smiles you traversed seas and arid wastes? Fear you not the just anger of a jealous God? Nay, lift up your aspirations to the grand emprise which has gathered you upon these distant shores! Let the one thought, the one aim which brought you hither, alone engage your attention! Cæsarea is before you. Malek Adhel defends it. The greater the obstacles you encounter, the greater will be the glory of your triumph. Go where God calls you, and forget not that he is culpable who would endeavor to conjoin worldly interests with those of Heaven!"

The words of the venerable prelate, as usual, carried

their point with all save Richard and Lusignan. There still rankled a sense of insulted authority in the one, of slighted affections in the other.

They insisted that while Matilda remained free, Malek Adhel's hopes would still exist to fire his courage. But William assured them that without compelling the princess to a distasteful marriage, there were other means which would effectually destroy the hopes of Malek Adhel.

"Let her avail herself of them then!" cried Richard hotly, "and that without delay. Let her pronounce vows which will separate her forever from a world into which she has appeared but to bring trouble and discord.— Forget her, Lusignan, she is not worthy of your regrets. Holy Father, to-morrow we march toward Cæsarea, meanwhile, do you go to my rebellious sister, bear to her the last commands of her offended king. Let her know that if within eight days she has not devoted her life to God's service, I shall go myself and compel her to belong to my friend."

The archbishop, aware that when in moods like these Richard would brook no interference of counsel or entreaty, bowed before the king and silently withdrew.

The campaign now promised to become an active one. Ptolemaïs was liable to attack at any moment, and was no longer a place of safety for non-combatants. The convent of Mount Carmel had always been respected by the Infidels, and Richard, anxious for Berengaria, determined to resign her for the present to the shelter of its sacred roof.

That very night he bade farewell to the queen, and placing her under the protection of the archbishop, bade them both spare no effort in endeavoring to dispose Matilda to submission to his will.

On presenting herself before the holy sisterhood of Carmel, and requesting admission, the princess had judged it best to conceal neither her name nor her rank, but their avowal was made with no evidence of pride.

"Behold not in me," she had said, "the sister of a powerful sovereign, but an unfortunate woman who, regretting her manifold errors, has come to learn wisdom and holiness in this consecrated retreat."

Her modesty, her gentleness, the meekness of her demeanor, won the hearts of the humble nuns whom her royal birth had in no wise dazzled. In that austere retreat no king but God was acknowledged, no kingdom but Heaven, no time but eternity; no sounds from the outer world ever intruded there, no breath of human passions troubled the peaceful atmosphere. All was peace, calm, silence. The rules of the order permitted no conversation save such as regarded religious themes, the very sounds of war which resounded throughout the country even to the foot of Mount Carmel, would have been ignored within this dwelling-place of peace, had not the Archbishop of Tyre informed the pious nuns of the new Crusade, invoking their prayers for the success of the enterprise.

Matilda was scarcely surprised by the archbishop's arrival. She had felt assured that he would not desert her, and was now as impatient to open her heart

to him as for some time past she had been reluctant to do so; but with unfeigned astonishment she beheld Berengaria, and the joy occasioned by the arrival of a sister to whom she was so sincerely attached was somewhat modified by a vague suspicion of the motives which had actuated her coming. Could Richard, she thought, have availed himself of the influence of the two beings whom she most reverenced, to endeavor to regain his authority over her?

But William soon set her fears at rest.

"My daughters," he said, addressing the assembled nuns, "the great ones of the earth come to you for refuge from the horrors of a sanguinary war. A noble queen asks your holy prayers for the safety of her gallant husband now gone forth to do battle in the name of religion, a young princess seeks from your example to learn to honor God above man, and I, my children, come to join my intercessions with yours, that the defeat of the Infidel may restore to ancient Zion her faith, her glory, her children, and her holy temples."

At a sign from the archbishop, the docile nuns knelt before their altars, their voices uniting in prayer and sacred chants. Matilda heard them, Matilda kneeling in their midst, shuddered as she listened to the pleading of those pious hearts for the destruction of the Infidel,—the destruction of the Infidel meant that of Malek Adhel.

The more it seemed impossible that Deity should turn a deaf ear to such fervent prayer, the more repugnant to her became a piety to which she attributed

such influence. Never had she been further from her God than in those moments when, in the midst of sacred images, pious canticles, and burning incense, it seemed to her all these solemn surroundings cried out to her incessantly that only by asking the death of Malek Adhel could she become worthy of Heaven.

At the conclusion of the service, the archbishop, dismissing his flock, intimated to Matilda a desire to converse with her in private.

"My daughter," he said, when they were alone, "in seeking refuge here, you doubtless intended remaining permanently?"

The princess' eyes sought the floor and a faint flush colored her face, but she made no answer.

"Had you confided your plans to me," continued William, "your flight would have been less unseemly. I would myself have accompanied you hither, and the world would have known that I was aware of your intentions and approved your resistance to your brother's demand. Yes, my child, I do approve your firmness in this respect. After your avowed preference for Malek Adhel, to consent to a marriage with another would have been to renounce that delicate purity which is woman's chiefest charm. But you would err equally in retaining a liberty which would seem to indicate that the world still possesses hopes and promises for you. You have loved, my daughter, you have loved not wisely but too well; such extremes are not blameless in the sight of God however innocent they may seem in the eyes of man. To God alone belongs such affection as

you yielded to His enemy — Malek Adhel. You were culpable, you deserved punishment. Be thankful that it was meted out to you in this world. As an expiation of your fault, God has forever separated you from him who has been its cause. Daughter of a race of kings, would you permit the world to think that the love of man has more power over you than the commands of the Church? Do not the rivers of blood, the mountains of dead, — that trace the footprints of this Mussulman,—render him repulsive in your eyes? Can you not decide to reject a man who has refused the only terms upon which you can honorably be his wife? Would you yet cling to one who has voluntarily renounced all claim upon you? For, if you retained no hope, why should you still desire to remain in the world?"

Gazing intently at her, he awaited her answer.

The countenance of the young girl betrayed the various emotions his words had evoked — pride, mortification, repentance, love, he read by turns, as upon the pages of a book.

For a few moments she remained in deep thought, then she replied.

"Father, you well know in what serene peace the first sixteen years of my life were passed, the seventeenth is not yet spent, and already my heart has been sorely tried with life's bitterest experiences. Ah, I have suffered too much in the world to regret leaving it! But, Father, deign to hear me. A promise still binds me. If your voice pronounces my release, all is over between the world and me, I shall remain within

these walls as in a tomb, forgotten of my fellow-beings; for what their eyes no longer see, their hearts soon learn to forget!"

The princess then gave the archbishop an account of all the important events that had transpired from the day of his departure for Cæsarea, and informed him through what a series of perplexing circumstances and unforeseen incidents, through what conflict of duties, and regard for her plighted word, she had reached the position in which he now found her.

The archbishop listened to her recital with profound interest, often with emotion: when she had finished, he resumed:

"My child, had you sought guidance from the book of Divine inspiration, you would have spared yourself the commission of many errors. You would have discovered that pride is the sin against which the Holy Scriptures chiefly warn us. It was pride which emboldened you to permit the frequent visits of Malek Adhel after my departure from Damietta; it was pride that, inspiring you with the hope of effecting the conversion of an Infidel, induced you to make the rash promise to belong to none but him; it was pride which, tempting you to endeavor more than your simple duty, impelled you to that first appointment in the tomb of Montmorency. It was kind, my child, to seek to save my life at so much risk and self-sacrifice, and believe me it requires much courage to enable me to reprove you, for I am more deeply touched than I can express, in discerning that you have done for my sake what

love itself could not have obtained of you. But the more indebted I feel towards you, the more sensible do I become of my duty to look with an impartial eye upon your errors. My child, the means which you employed to effect my safety were blamable, therefore you should not have adopted them; you should have left my deliverance to God, and not have considered yourself called upon to act in His stead.— And now Malek Adhel has exacted of you a promise not to take the veil without his consent. For a moment your fate was at the disposal of Malek Adhel. The power was his to become arbiter of your life, here and hereafter, and yet he could renounce the only happiness with which he is acquainted, to entrust you to a God whom he disowns. What strange things are transpiring within that Infidel heart! What moving of the Holy Spirit over the benighted waters! My child, let us trust and pray, without presuming to draw the veil from before that which is hidden in the mystery of futurity. Meanwhile, submit yourself to the authority of this house while awaiting the attestation which must surely come, of God's superior will."

In obedience to his injunctions, the young princess divested herself of her splendid attire, and adopted the humble habit of the Carmelite nuns. Submissive to the rules of their order, she accepted the same privations, practised the same austerities apportioned to them, and joined regularly in their religious exercises, only separating her prayers from theirs, when they invoked Divine retribution upon all enemies of the faith.

Berengaria had at last recognized the full force of the obstacles which separated Matilda from the prince, or obedience to her lord's commands required her silence, for her lips never uttered the name so sweet to the expectant ears of her sister; and feigning to perceive neither her anxiety nor her melancholy, she would turn away her eyes whenever those of Matilda attempted to question her.

Ere long fresh cause arose to uphold the queen in her resolute reticence, and to give a less excusable aspect to Matilda's weakness. Since the sojourn of the Queen of England in the Carmelite convent, tidings from the outer world more frequently penetrated its peaceful walls. News came one day that the Christians had at last laid siege to Cæsarea, and were preparing for an assault; but that the city, defended by Malek Adhel, would offer a determined resistance, and succumb only after a terrible struggle.

Hearing this, the queen's conjugal love overpowered all sense of gratitude, and she beheld in Malek Adhel only the most formidable enemy of Richard. The archbishop never seemed to weary of repeating that, should the Crusaders meet with a repulse before Cæsarea, their defeat would effectually destroy all hope of regaining Jerusalem.

The nuns became alarmed; the convent bells sent forth peal after peal, awaking the solemn echoes of cell and corridor; prayers and holy chants were recommenced with renewed fervor; while the wretched princess, denied even the comfort of solitude, shed bitter

tears as she knelt before the altar, scarcely conscious for whom she prayed, yet assured that whatsoever she might ask of Heaven could bring her but a newer sorrow.

CHAPTER XXI.

SECURE in her broad, deep moats, her high walls, her strong citadel, her numerous garrison; secure, still more, in the presence of an invincible commander, Cæsarea beheld without anxiety the entire army of the Crusaders preparing to besiege her.

Immediately upon their arrival before the walls of Cæsarea, Richard and Lusignan, animated by an ardor which was not untinged by personal animosity towards Malek Adhel, caused the city to be encompassed on every side. Their miners were sent into the ditches to sap the walls, while the archers endeavored to protect their persons by directing a constant rain of arrows against the besieged, who, in turn, worked their heavy machinery upon the walls with terrible effect, crushing with stones and wounding with darts myriads of their enemies.

Emboldened by Malek Adhel's presence, and confident of victory under his leadership, the Mussulmans were already becoming restive at the prospect of remaining simply on the defensive, and were anxious to make sallies upon the enemy. But to all propositions of the kind Malek Adhel turned a deaf ear. Faithful to his brother, he was resolved to defend Cæsarea; but

while fulfilling this duty, Matilda's lover desired, as far as possible, to avoid shedding the blood of Christians.

This thought, confined to his own breast, imparted to his actions an appearance of timidity which emboldened the hopes of his assailants. Each day the assaults of the Christians became more venturesome. Lusignan, recklessly exposing his person, seemed to court danger in whatever direction it was to be found; urging, exhorting his men, he himself set them the example; aiding with his own hands to raise the ponderous ladders against the walls, he was ever the first to attempt the perilous escalade.

In concert with Richard, he had caused a portion of the eastern wall to be undermined. Watching his opportunity, the intrepid warrior now advanced at the head of his men, and regardless of the missiles which rained down upon him, fired with his own hand the supporting stanchions. Suddenly, with a noise like the heavy roll of thunder, the massive wall, giving way, fell into the moat.

But the Saracens had foreseen this emergency. Behind their threatened wall they had erected an immense rampart of wood saturated with inflamable material; at a given signal the torch was applied, and the Crusaders, mounting to the breach were arrested by an impassable rampart of fire.

They hesitated, daunted by this unexpected obstacle. But Lusignan's resolute voice urged them on; Richard's flashing sword showed them the prize beyond. The men were preparing for a determined onslaught

through fire and missiles, when beyond the now crumbling rampart of fire a third appeared in view — a solid wall of bronzed Mussulman veterans, and at their head their terrible captain, Malek Adhel. At this sight the Crusaders, already but partly reassured, became demoralized. In their superstitious eyes the Evil One himself had appeared, in the form of the Infidel prince, surrounded by unearthly fires. Terror spread from rank to rank, and despite the voices of command and of entreaty from their officers, the men incontinently fled. Finding themselves thus exposed to danger which could advantage them nothing, Richard and Lusignan withdrew with the handful of men who had remained faithful to their duty, and returned to camp, there to conceal their rage and disappointment, and to meditate upon a new plan of action.

Far from yielding to despondency at the failure which had attended previous efforts, the Crusaders resolved upon renewed exertions. The men, now convinced of the absurdity of their superstitious fears, became doubly anxious to retrieve the disgrace of their cowardly retreat, and worked with a will wherever their services were required in preparations for a fresh attack. Whole nights were spent in constructing more formidable machines of war; from the mountains environing the camp were dragged great stones, with which to fill the deep ditches surrounding the walls.

Scarcely were the Crusaders' preparations completed, when the sound of trumpet and kettle-drum, the rumbling of heavy machines of war, the stern voice of

command of the officers, the eager, responsive cries of the men, announced that a general assault had commenced.

Richard, Lusignan, and the Duke of Burgundy, joined their efforts against one of the strongest towers which guarded Cæsarea. They caused its supports to be undermined, and from the shelter of the ponderous machine which bore them into the hottest of the fray, they hurled huge iron hooks against the walls, and battered its face with rams.

At last, yielding to their attack, the tower gave way and fell. Elated with their success, and confident of victory, the Christians hastened forward to throw themselves into the breach. But a second time fire arrested their progress. An immense quantity of burning hay and straw served as an impervious barrier to the Mussulmans, while volumes of suffocating smoke poured into the Christian ranks, blinding the besiegers as effectively as did the glare of the flames.

The Crusaders paused undaunted, awaiting the consumption of the combustible materials to follow up their advantage. But with the clearing smoke they discovered a barrier more formidable than any they had yet encountered; an impenetrable wall of spears, pikes, and lances, so ingeniously constructed that not a single man of those who sustained them could be seen. In vain the Christians, recalling to mind their previous discomfiture, endeavored to advance; the immovable phalanx repulsed without attacking them.

Richard himself paused for an instant, awe-stricken; then, seeing Lusignan at his side:

"My friend," he said, "we did not anticipate obstacles like this; but the requirements of duty remain unchanged. Whatever the cost, Cæsarea must be taken. In throwing ourselves against this terrible wall we rush to a certain death; but those who follow in our tracks may profit by the momentary diversion and effect an entrance into the city."

"Well said, Richard!" cried Lusignan aglow with excitement; "this is no moment for prudence or calculation. Let us win victory, or accept death. But let me precede you, Richard, I pray, that, should I fall, you may still survive to consummate our victory, and rid the earth of my detested rival."

"Precedence in danger I yield to no man!" returned Richard haughtily; "even to you I can scarcely pardon the suggestion;" he added more kindly: "Come, Lusignan, let us triumph or perish together!"

"Christians," cried Lusignan, "behind yon wall are the palms of martyrdom — the crowns of saints! Would you win them? — Follow me!"

He sprang forward, his men following closely.

Suddenly the terrible wall, hitherto inflexible as fate, without changing its aspect, moved forward with prodigious rapidity. The Christians, at the sight of this forest of glittering steel moving upon them as though by the work of enchantment, fell back step by step, making but vain show of resistance. Vast numbers, crowding upon each other in panic-stricken haste, fell pell-mell into the moats. The rout was complete; despite his dogged resistance, Lusignan was borne away in the general rush.

The Duke of Burgundy, at the head of his valiant Frenchmen, still offered resistance, but was at last compelled to retire.

Richard, from the breach he had vainly endeavored to force, now sprang across the ditch. On its opposite bank he stopped, reluctant to relinquish his prey; his flaming eyes gazed with fierce longing at the city from which he had been repulsed. He no longer perceived his routed hosts flying in confusion from the scene; he forgot that he was alone, and with a cry of rage he sprang toward the foe.

The Mussulmans, recognizing him, rushed to meet and secure their royal prize.

"It is the King of England," they cried exultantly; "it is Richard of the lion-heart!"

"It is Richard!" said one whom the king recognized. "It is Richard, alone and on foot! Bring him a horse!" *

At the bidding of their chief, the Saracens presented the king with a magnificent charger, and retired into the city where Malek Adhel, preceding them, was already engaged in superintending the repairing of the mutilated walls.

With a heavy heart Richard slowly returned to camp; mortified at his defeat, indignant at this fresh obligation imposed upon him by his enemy, doubting whether hatred or admiration of his foe predominated.

A general gloom prevailed throughout the camp, and total discouragement was evident.

* Historical.

Lusignan, filled with rage, and covered with blood and dust, stood in his tent, lost in meditation, leaning upon his long lance.

Courage had played him false; he resolved to obtain through other means the victory which had just eluded his grasp. He kept to himself the dark schemes which suggested themselves to his busy brain, knowing full well that Richard would oppose all means not strictly in conformity with the laws of honor, and reject with contempt even such as would facilitate the one great end in view — an entrance into Jerusalem.

His plans were already formed, his resolution taken, when the King of England rejoined him. In silence the two men met, in silence they stood, with locked hands and gloomy countenances.

Lusignan first spoke.

"My brother," he said, "it is useless to think of a fresh assault. If some important victory elsewhere does not intervene to reanimate the hopes of our army, we shall perish before the besieged city in inglorious inaction. Richard, let us carry our arms elsewhere. Let us divide our forces; and while one of us attacks Saladin, the other will remain to watch the enemy and prevent a sortie, should Malek Adhel, emboldened by success, attempt to make one. Richard, to me belongs the better right to meet that arrogant prince . . ."

"And I," interrupted the King of England, a dark flush mounting into his bronzed cheek, "have forfeited through unwelcome obligations, the right to seek the life of Malek Adhel. I will go to meet Saladin at Ascalon."

Lusignan's suggestions were communicated by Richard to the other leaders of the army, and met with unqualified approval.

The army was separated into two divisions, one portion under Richard's own command set forth towards Ascalon, the other at his request was confided to the King of Jerusalem, by whom the plan was first conceived, and whose intrepid valor was by general consent deemed worthy of so high a mark of confidence.

Notwithstanding Richard's precautions, nothing escaped the vigilance of Malek Adhel. He observed that a portion of the Christian army was withdrawing from the camp and defiling through the forests which environed Cæsarea, but he failed to discover by whom it was led, or for what point it was destined. Vague rumors intimated that it was proceeding in the direction of Ptolemaïs, but reliable information was unattainable.

The mystery might indeed have been solved had the Saracen prince decided upon a rally. He was acquainted with various detours by means of which he could readily intercept and surprise the Christians, and effect an easy victory. But Malek Adhel revolted at the thought of unnecessarily shedding the blood of Matilda's countrymen.

The Crusaders, retired within the security of their camp, had ceased their attacks, and Malek Adhel, unmolested, took advantage of the temporary cessation of hostilities to repair the damage his fortifications had sustained during the recent attack of the enemy. He erected a new tower upon the site of that which had

been destroyed, repaired the breaches, and strengthened the supports of his walls.

One day some Mussulman soldiers, descending into the moat to repair a defective stanchion, surprised a Christian soldier who seemed to be watching them intently. They seized and brought him before their prince.

At the sight of Malek Adhel the soldier became strangely agitated.

Attributing his emotion to fear, the prince regarded him with contempt.

"The Christians would have been more sensible had they entrusted so hazardous an errand to one less faint-hearted," he said; "but mayhap a brave man would not have accepted the office."

A strange look of perplexity and disquiet came into the man's eyes, but as quickly gave place to one of extreme dejection.

"Ah, Prince," he said humbly, "it is not fear for the safety of this worthless carcass that thus moves me, it is remorse — remorse for an act of treachery which the sight of you recalls!"

"Remorse, for an act committed against me? Speak, man; to my knowledge your path has never crossed my own."

"Nevertheless, Prince, in betraying our sweet lady, I have done you an injury which it may already be too late to repair," said the soldier gloomily.

Malek Adhel sprang to his feet.

"Speak out, man," he cried; "what new misfortune has befallen the Princess of England?"

"I must speak to you in private," replied the man, with increasing agitation.

Malek Adhel signed to the guard who stood near to retire. The stranger threw himself at the feet of his judge.

"Great Prince," he cried, his voice broken by sobs, "I am unworthy to live. I have betrayed you; I have betrayed the Princess Matilda. At this very moment she doubtless accuses you of failing her in the time of sorest need!"

"Cut short your words! Every useless one shall be accounted against you!"

"Oh, magnanimous Prince, your anger overwhelms my courage; I dare not confess!"

"Your pardon is granted. Delay no longer!" answered Malek Adhel, with difficulty controlling his fierce impatience.

"Thanks, mighty Prince; your leniency emboldens me. Perchance it may not yet be too late! I know not whether your penetration, which nothing seems to escape, has marked the absence of Richard, and the plans of Lusignan."

A horrible suspicion crossed Malek Adhel's mind.

"I have indeed observed that a portion of the army had been detached from the main body," he replied, "but I am, of course, unacquainted with the object of this movement. Hasten to explain it, if it has aught to do with the tidings you bear of the Princess of England!"

The stranger continued·

"The very night following the day upon which you repulsed the Christians from before your walls, Richard, at the head of the larger half of our army, marched towards Ascalon, with the design of surprising Saladin and avenging his defeat. Lusignan remained in supreme command of the camp.

"Shortly after the departure of the English king, Lusignan announced to the other leaders of the army that Richard, on his way to Ascalon, would stop for a few hours at the convent of Mount Carmel.

"'There,' he added, 'the king awaits me; there I shall receive from his hands my fair bride; there we shall more effectually avenge ourselves on Malek Adhel, and at the same time destroy the hopes which inspire him with an almost superhuman courage.'

"No one suspected the King of Jerusalem of duplicity. No one thought of opposing his departure. Accompanied by a small escort of soldiers, of whose number I chanced to be, he set forth for the convent of Mount Carmel. Prince, how can I finish the disgraceful story! Lusignan had lied to the Christian leaders. He had purposely removed Richard in order to accomplish his dark designs. I witnessed the violation of the sanctuary by the sacrilegious king; I saw the protecting doors of the cloister cast down; I beheld the Princess of England, pale and trembling, brought before him; I heard her entreaties, her prayers. But Lusignan had neither pity nor remorse. He ordered the convent chapel to be decorated with flowers, and illuminated with a display suitable to the occasion of the

august nuptials which would be celebrated on the morrow.

"But as I stood on guard at the outer door of the cloister, the Countess of Leicester, passing by, recognized me. She hastened forward and slipped a folded paper into my hand.

"'If, at an early hour to-morrow,' she said, 'this note is in the hands of Prince Malek Adhel, he will reward you well.'

"She seemed about to say more, but Lusignan at that moment entered from an opposite door at the end of the main corridor, and the faithful friend of the princess hastily withdrew.

"I had hurriedly concealed the paper with which the countess had entrusted me, but not quickly enough to escape the suspicious eye of Lusignan. 'Give me the letter,' he demanded imperiously. My lord, dare I avow it! I was intimidated by his anger; I did not venture to question his authority in the matter; I drew the paper from my bosom and laid it in his outstretched hand. He flung his purse at my feet and retired with his prize.

"But repentance followed close in the traces of my cowardice. I could not remain to witness the consummation of a sacrifice I might have been able to prevent. A faint hope even suggested itself that I might yet redeem my fault. I escaped in the darkness of the night, and never drew rein until I had reached our camp. Since early morning I have been hovering around the fortifications of Cæsarea, anxious to be cap-

tured and taken before you, in order to acquaint you with the facts which I have just narrated, yet evading such opportunities when they presented themselves, withheld by the ever-recurring fear that my story, unsubstantiated by the token I had relinquished, would be disbelieved, and that I should be regarded and punished as a spy."

"And this day," said Malek Adhel, his face white and set, his eyes gleaming with dangerous fires, "this very day is the one designed by Lusignan for the accomplishment of his dastardly schemes?"

"It is, Prince; but the Princess of England may have won further delay."

"And I cannot go to her until the shadows of the night come to conceal my departure from the Christians!"

Absorbed in painful thought, he leaned his head upon his open palm. The prisoner's voice recalled him to himself.

"Of a free pardon, Prince, you have already assured me; may I, emboldened by your generosity, claim another favor at your hands?"

"Speak."

"The workers of evil are always suspicious, my lord. Lusignan, acquainted with the contents of the note entrusted to me by the countess, and with the fact of my sudden flight from Carmel, will regard with suspicious eye the circumstance of my having been captured almost immediately upon my return to camp. He will investigate the matter; for no affair, however trivial, is con-

sidered beneath the notice of his ever-watchful eye; he will discover that I was, in truth, no emissary sent from camp to obtain information of your means of defence. My lord, I shall escape punishment here, only to meet a similar penalty at the hands of my own people."

"What would you ask of me?" enquired Malek Adhel, who had paid little attention to the man's lengthy discourse.

"Permission to remain with you, Prince; permission to conceal myself in Cæsarea until such time as Your Highness will give me an opportunity to attach myself to the service of his fair and august bride — the Princess Matilda."

Malek Adhel nodded assent, won more by the man's flattering insinuation than by the personal reasons he had advanced, although those, indeed, could not have failed to have their effect upon his generous nature.

At nightfall Malek Adhel summoned to his presence his two most faithful servitors, Kaled and Mohammed.

"Mohammed," he said, addressing the latter, "matters of vital importance require my attention beyond Cæsarea. I shall be absent for two days. During that period I desire you to take command here. Have no anxiety, however, the city will not be attacked. I have positive information that both Richard and Lusignan have left their camp; and pending their return the Crusaders will not venture upon a fresh assault. As for you, Kaled, select thirty of my most trusty warriors; bid them prepare for an enterprise full of peril; for wherever we find the enemy I seek, and whatever the

numbers by which he has surrounded himself, we shall engage him in mortal strife. And now away, my friend. Lose not a moment. Within an hour we leave Cæsarea behind us."

Confident that the Christian prisoner had betrayed to the prince some secret plan of his countrymen, Mohammed and Kaled hastened forward the completion of the necessary preparations, rejoicing at beholding him, as they supposed, at last aroused to the necessity of more active measures against the enemy.

CHAPTER XXII.

On leaving Cæsarea, Malek Adhel took a circuitous route to enable him to attain, unobserved by the Christians, the forest which environed their camp. Prudence, which had never before found a place in his fearless heart, was now consulted; for upon his speedy arrival depended a safety far more precious in his sight than his own.

At break of day he had reached the summit of a hill from whence he could discover in the distance the beetling cliffs of Mount Carmel overlooking the sea. At this sight all self-control seemed to desert him; a thousand fears, a thousand torturing misgivings beset him. He closely pressed the flanks of his courser, and sped away with the fleetness of the wind. His warriors with difficulty kept him in sight. Kaled, perceiving the direction the prince had taken, became disturbed. Never-

theless, with the same reckless speed he followed his master, actuated by an anxiety almost as great as his own, though springing from a widely different source.

Arrived within a short distance of the monastery, Malek Adhel drew rein, awaiting Kaled. His faithful servitor was at his side in a moment.

"Lusignan is there!" said the prince hoarsely, pointing as he spoke toward the cloister.

"Is it he alone whom you have come to seek?" asked Kaled dubiously.

"I have come to seek and to punish that false knight; but I am here chiefly to snatch the Princess Matilda from his odious embrace. Follow me, Kaled, we have no time to lose."

"I obey," replied Kaled gloomily; "for argument would now be vain. Had I suspected the object of this journey, you should have left Cæsarea only over my inanimate corpse. Ah, Prince, may your imprudence not cost you even more than life!"

Malek Adhel paid little heed to his friend's words. Closely followed by his warriors, he rushed into the court-yard of the convent. The silence was unbroken, save by the reverberation of their iron heels upon the pavement. The great door of the main entrance was fastened. The prince ordered it to be demolished. As it sprang from its hinges Malek Adhel, with drawn cimeter, entered the sacred edifice. He looked about him, seeking some indication whereby to direct his steps; the long corridors were deserted. He

lent an attentive ear to the faintest echo that broke the oppressive stillness; the sound of female voices uniting in sacred canticles was faintly heard. Was it the epithalamium of those odious nuptials — the death-song of his happiness — of Matilda's! Malek Adhel hastened his steps in the direction from whence the sounds proceeded. He traversed an interior court overgrown with weeds, and reached a small edifice whose Gothic style of architecture, colored panes, and cross-surmounted belfry indicated the chapel pertaining to the monastery. The Saracen hurried up the steps; through the open door he saw the interior garlanded with flowers; incense floated on the ambient air; waxen tapers shed a soft light about the altars. The Archbishop of Tyre, in his episcopal robes, stood in the chancel, with hands outstretched as though in the act of blessing the black-robed nuns who knelt before him. In their midst, among, yet not of them, was a slight, girlish form, enveloped in the folds of her long, white, novice's veil.

A stranger to the ceremonials observed by the Christian church, these imposing surroundings seemed to Malek Adhel to be part of the nuptial rites of which he had been forewarned. Lusignan was not in sight; probably the moment of his approach to claim his bride had not yet arrived. The impetuous prince could control himself no longer. With a loud cry, that broke into a thousand reverberating echoes as it went sounding through the vaulted roof, he sprang forward, closely followed by his warriors.

"I am here, Lusignan," he shouted, "dispute her with me if you dare!"

Overthrowing every object that intercepted his way, Malek Adhel strode forward and from the very altar where she had retreated in sudden terror, he snatched the white-veiled novice and clasped her to his breast.

The benediction had died, half uttered upon the stern lips of the archbishop, with wild shrieks the frightened women fled before the Infidel soldiers, seeking shelter in the chancel, behind the altars, in the vestry.

Holding his prize close-clasped to his heart, Malek Adhel's searching eye scanned the scene. Still the object he sought did not appear.

"Lusignan," he shouted again, "false knight, craven king, come from your hiding-place, Malek Adhel awaits you!"

With drawn sword and flashing eye he awaited the response of his rival. None came. Malek Adhel began to suspect a snare. Upon his safety depended that of Matilda. He waited no longer, but hastened with rapid strides to the door, bearing his now unconscious burthen in his arms. He crossed the court, re-entered the convent, and thence, unmolested, passed out into the surrounding woodland.

At the foot of Mount Carmel he found a stream of water issuing cold and clear from some rocky recess. He relinquished his burthen now, and with tender hand bathed her pallid face.

His efforts were ere long rewarded with success. Matilda sighed heavily and opened her surprised eyes

to her strange surroundings, Malek Adhel on bended knee before her, his swarth-visaged warriors standing a short distance beyond, the forest scene with its waving foliage and murmuring brook. She sat up like one in a dream, clasping her hands above her throbbing temples.

"Oh, Malek Adhel," she said at last, "what have you done?"

"I have saved you once more, my beloved."

Ere she could respond, Kaled came forward.

"Oh rash Prince," he exclaimed, "how dare you remain thus tranquilly upon this dangerous spot, with snares and death encompassing your every step!"

Thus aroused from a sense of infinite joy to one of threatened danger to Matilda, Malek Adhel sprang to his feet and lifting the young girl on his horse, gave the signal for departure.

Now that she was in his arms, close-pressed to his throbbing heart, a thousand fears beset him. Should Lusignan have gone to summon an overwhelming detachment of Christians to rescue the princess, he felt but too keenly the impossibility of doing more than giving his life in the vain effort to save her.

At the bare thought of beholding Matilda in the arms of Lusignan, Malek Adhel shuddered from head to foot, and for the first time in his life terror took possession of his dauntless soul. In the sound produced by the crushing of the dead leaves beneath the horses' feet, he seemed to hear that of the enemy's approach. When the long shadows of the night descended upon

the earth, peopling the space with a thousand fantastic images, on every side he seemed to perceive a Christian, to surprise a spy, to recognize the serried ranks of foemen prepared to intercept his progress. In the very moaning of the winds as they bent in their passage the patriarchal crests of the ancient pines and sycamores, he heard the fancied sound of martial music, the low murmur of approaching voices.

Overcome by his anxious fears, Malek Adhel kept silence. He dared not speak even to Matilda, lest the sound of his voice should reach his pursuers. But she, gradually recovering from the stupor which had succeeded the agitation of the morning, began to question him.

"You have saved me once more, you assure me, Malek Adhel," she said, "with what dreadful danger can I have been threatened, that you have dared to violate the sanctuary of the Lord?"

"Can you ask, Matilda," cried her lover with surprise, "when Lusignan was there? When already beyond the altar whence I snatched you, the arms of the man you loathed awaited you? . . ."

"What do you mean?" interrupted the princess, in the most profound astonishment, "since my departure from Ptolemaïs I have never beheld Lusignan, and if the Archbishop of Tyre is not mistaken, my brother has abandoned all thought of compelling me to a marriage so repugnant to me, and leaves me free to devote my life to God's service."

A sudden light seemed to break upon the Saracen prince.

"And the Christian soldier who brought me an account of your dire extremity, who assured me that Lusignan was on the eve of compelling you to become his bride, was an imposter — his story a snare!"

"Assuredly," replied the princess.

"Can truth have been so ably counterfeited! Nay, 'tis my own blind credulity I must hold answerable! Your dear name has been the open sesame to my weakness. Oh, my beloved," he added, with suddenly returning alarm, "may you not become a victim to my imprudence! The Christians, exultant in their treachery, will not forego its rich harvest. They await us, doubtless in yon wood, and I dare not take you to Cæsarea. But what other refuge can I offer you! It is too late to retrace our steps, the Christians must already have encompassed Mount Carmel expecting to ensnare us:— besides, Matilda, I dare not prolong my absence from the city entrusted to my defence. Oh, dupe, oh, fool that I have been! Where shall I turn my steps! Where shall I hide my shame!"

He abruptly reined in his horse, no longer daring to advance, and calling Kaled to his side confided to his faithful esquire the horrors of his situation. Kaled dropped his head in undisguised consternation, seeing with his master the impossibility of a return to Cæsarea.

In the midst of his perplexity a sudden recollection crossed his mind and brought with it a glimmer of hope.

"My Prince," he said, "if memory fails me not, life and honor may yet be saved. Opposite the Crusa-

ders' camp at the western extremity of Cæsarea, near the gate of Omar, is a vast excavation, which by subterranean passages winds its course to a mass of cavernous rocks on the confines of the sand-wastes environing Jaffa. Since the Christians have been driven from all the maritime cities of Syria, this gloomy labyrinth has been abandoned, but I remember having once threaded its intricacies during a former sojourn in Cæsarea."

"Must we make a long detour to reach it?" inquired Malek Adhel anxiously.

"The whole of to-morrow will scarce suffice," Kaled answered.

"Well, as no other resource remains, let us avail ourselves of it as speedily as possible," said the prince. "Lead the way, Kaled."

Turning aside from the route they had been pursuing they took that leading toward the south, and traversed a dense forest stretching far into the interior, cutting their way through interlacing boughs and thick-growing brush, and surmounting rocks and fallen tree-trunks which intercepted their progress.

By break of day they had reached the outlet of the gloomy solitudes, and with the light and the open space found a temporary security.

While Kaled and his men went to seek food from some laborers whose cottages they perceived hard by, Malek Adhel brought mosses and thick foliaged branches from the forest, and raised a verdant bower where Matilda might snatch a few moments' rest.

But when the mind is a prey to anxiety, the physical powers, in close sympathy, refuse repose. Malek Adhel, perceiving the expression of despondency upon the face he so loved, came and seated himself beside her.

"The evil designs of the Christians will rebound upon themselves," he said; "when they discover that not only I have escaped their snares, but that you are secure within my palace, they will be sufficiently punished."

The princess sighed and was silent.

"What, Matilda," exclaimed Malek Adhel, with an impatience he could no longer repress, "do you still sigh for your cloister? Do you regret being with me? Can you not rejoice in a reunion for which your will was blameless? Will love never reign supreme in your heart?"

The young girl turned upon him eyes full of tenderness.

"Would that your reproaches were deserved, Malek Adhel! Would that I could conceal, even from myself, the guilty joy I feel at the thought of the impossibility of retracing my steps! All through the night while we silently traversed that grand and gloomy forest, I was planning means of returning to my convent. But only at the hazard of your life or that of your faithful Kaled, could I make the attempt. To every plan that presented itself I found an obstacle, and in every obstacle I rejoiced. O weak heart that would behold with pain a path that would lead me safely back to my God!"

She buried her face in her hands to hide from her lover's eager gaze her love, her shame, and her repentant tears.

Malek Adhel strained her with rapture to his heart.

"Oh, supreme joy!" he cried, "I have nothing more to fear — nothing more to anticipate, save happiness . . ."

"Speak no more to me of happiness!" interrupted the young girl, "you who have violated the sanctity of God's holy temple — I who yield to the guilty joy of loving you, can expect only the vengeance of an offended God!"

Ere Malek Adhel could reply, Kaled rejoined them, bringing some coarse articles of food procured from the neighboring cottages.

"Let us tarry no longer," he said, "we must reach the entrance to the subterranean passage ere nightfall, that I may be able to discern and recognize it."

All day they pursued their weary journey across the vast plains lying between Ramla and Cæsarea, and at nightfall reached the group of rocks indicated by Kaled. Here they halted, and Malek Adhel paused a moment, irresolute. Towards the west lay Jaffa, at present under command of Metchoub; a little nearer, northward, Cæsarea. For himself, he must at all hazards return to the latter city, but he questioned in his own mind whether Matilda would not be more secure in the former place. A besieged city, subject to all the horrors of war, was scarcely a suitable refuge for his tender love, yet in her defence he was conscious of an ad-

ditional incentive which would render him invincible. Besides, Metchoub commanded at Jaffa, and Metchoub had proved himself Matilda's bitterest enemy. This thought decided him.

The soldiers, under Kaled's directions, had already entered the cavern, bearing torches made of the resinous pine which they had prepared by the way; Malek Adhel wound his arm about the young girl and followed them. The sombre path seemed to lead downward into the very bowels of the earth. At times the ceiling of the cavern became so low that the fugitives were compelled to crawl on all-fours upon the damp earth; further on, sharp-pointed rocks arrested their progress and were surmounted only at the cost of much weariness and pain; at times their path closely threaded abysses of unfathomable blackness, into whose depths huge rocks, detached by their unwary feet, were hurled, leaving not an echo behind. Further on, the vivid light of the torches illuminated a scene of weird grandeur: a high-arching roof, whence hung numberless stalactites of glittering crystal, stretched far beyond their sight, into impenetrable space; underfoot, crystal and various mineral deposits scintillated in the fitful gleams which lighted their path. Myriads of bats and birds of night, whose countless generations had never beheld the light of day, startled by the flaring lights and sound of foreign voices and footsteps, circled about their heads, then fled with impish shrieks into remoter depths of Cimmerian darkness.

Despite every possible effort to spare her fatigue,

Matilda pursued the weary journey with difficulty. Malek Adhel would have borne her in his arms, but the frequent obstacles which beset their way rendered this at times impossible. The jutting rocks tore her dress and bruised her delicate flesh, her hands were bleeding from contact with the sharp stalagmites to which she was compelled to cling while threading narrow defiles where Malek Adhel's support was unavailable.

The courage of the prince began to waver as he observed the sufferings of her he loved. It deserted him altogether when Kaled, suddenly retracing his steps, with a countenance pale with concern announced that a huge mass of rock had fallen before the narrow entrance they must penetrate in order to reach the last of the subterranean chambers.

Exhausted by fatigue and exposure, the young princess leaned heavily for support against the pile of rock she had been endeavoring to surmount. The bronze-faced warriors gathered around, no less dispirited. The silence of despair was upon them all.

Malek Adhel started to his feet. Habituated to directing the will of others, Matilda's peril and the passive despair of his followers nerved him to renewed effort. Bidding the young girl await his return, he snatched a torch from one of the men, and telling his warriors to scatter in various directions in search of a new outlet, he disappeared in the impenetrable darkness.

The moments were lengthening into hours. The princess with a patience devoid of hope, still kept her

lonely watch. What mattered it indeed whether these gloomy caverns became their sepulchre, since the life beyond had nought save sorrow to offer!

But a shout, whose joyful tones proclaimed success, resounded through the vaulted chambers and corridors, the echoes caught and repeated them one to another, then human voices, one by one, joined in the triumphant refrain.

Malek Adhel first reached the spot where he had left Matilda. To him was due the discovery of an issue from these cavernous recesses. One by one his men returned from their less-successful errand; and the party set forth once more.

After continuing their route a few hours, a purer atmosphere informed them that they were approaching the termination of their journey. Soon a faint light penetrated through the fissures of the rocks. Kaled and his men extinguished their torches, and their light was quickly succeeded by the lambent beams of the moon, as they struggled in through the interstices of a mass of ivy which thickly curtained the outer opening of the subterranean passage.

Drawing his cimeter Kaled cut asunder this feeble obstruction which prevented their egress. Another step, and Cæsarea was before him. He recognized the gate of Omar, with its watchful sentinel; he beheld upon the walls and mosques the floating colors of the Crescent, and towards the north the camp of the Crusaders, reposing in peaceful security upon the moonlit plain.

Kaled's faithful heart thrilled with joy.

"Mahomet has watched over you," he said, as the prince, who had lingered behind to assist the slow progress of Matilda, now rejoined him.

The men formed in line on either side, that their chief might pass before them into the light and life beyond. With his supporting arm still about the young girl, Malek Adhel advanced towards the gate of Omar.

At the name of the prince the ponderous doors swung open; armed men surrounded him — men armed and habited like his own Saracens.

"Saved at last, my beloved!" he cried with joyful exultation; "the Christians are dupes of their own perfidy, and neither Richard nor Lusignan can ever again wrest you from my arms!"

Even while he spoke, the men who surrounded them suddenly closed in upon them, and snatched from the grasp of the Saracen prince his sabre and the young princess; almost simultaneously, Kaled and his warriors were disarmed and manacled before amazement had permitted them to strike a blow in defence of their liberty.

Malek Adhel looked around him like a man under some sorcerer's baneful spell.

"Infernal miracle!" he cried. "Where am I?"

"In the power of the Christians — of Lusignan," replied the King of Jerusalem, making his way through the ranks of his disguised soldiers: "Cæsarea as well as Matilda, is mine, and you are my prisoner."

Overwhelmed by this confirmation of his horrible

misgivings, Malek Adhel seemed struck with sudden paralysis. His eyes, dilated with the agony of despair, roamed from face to face; wherever they rested he saw evidence of triumph and rejoicing over his downfall.

Aye, all was lost: liberty — Matilda — honor! Conscious shame overcame his native pride. The haughty head of the Saracen prince drooped upon his breast, and his hands submitted without a struggle to the ignominious chains with which his triumphant rival ordered them to be loaded.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EARLY on the following morning, as the Princess of England sat in a chamber of the palace appropriated to the use of Lusignan, a page entered, bearing a request from the King of Jerusalem to be admitted to her presence. Ere she had time to return a haughty refusal, Lusignan himself, following close upon the steps of his messenger, entered the room.

The princess shuddered, turned pale, and arose from her chair, regarding him with a look of haughty inquiry. Lusignan's eyes drooped. His arrogant nature, which had not feared to flaunt his triumph in the face of a disarmed rival, now quailed before the anger of a young girl.

"And it is you, King of Jerusalem," she said icily, "who have made yourself master of Cæsarea! Aye, truly, on beholding the hands of a brave man loaded

with chains, I might well be assured of my brother's absence!"

"Madam," he replied suavely, "the Christians are indebted to me for a great victory; and cannot the pious Princess Matilda rejoice with them?"

"I should rejoice, indeed," she returned, "if their honor were not dearer to me than their triumph; if this victory were not the fruit of treachery . . ."

"Our enemies themselves, Madam, could scarcely advance a more bitter accusation," interrupted Lusignan angrily.

"Yet it is one which Richard were he here would himself declare. His noble spirit would scorn even the appearance of a treacherous act, and his sister is proud of sharing his views. Think you Richard 'Cœur-de-Lion' would have suffered your hands to manacle those of his benefactor, those of the grandest hero the world has ever known!"

Lusignan trembled with rage.

"Your Highness has certainly an exalted conception of the extent of your power over me, since you do not fear to give utterance in my presence to such extravagant terms of praise of a rival whose fate is in my hands."

"Sire," she replied gravely, "in rendering justice to Malek Adhel, what can I fear from you? Rather, do you not degrade yourself by pretending that my power over you is the sole cause of your refraining from the commission of an act of cowardly brutality? A Christian and a knight dare not sully his honor by even the contemplation of the crime you would suggest."

"Ah, Matilda," cried Lusignan with passionate warmth, "you have little conception of the strength of the sentiment with which you have inspired me, if you can believe that any other power than that you wield could quell the violence of a jealousy so long restrained!"

As he spoke, he regarded the princess with such burning glances that for a moment she was terrified. She was alone with a bold, impassioned lover, whose authority was supreme in the palace, in the city itself; but placing her trust in a power higher than his, she regained her self-possession ere he had time to perceive its absence.

"Sire," she said coldly, "in listening to your discourse, one might suppose that your voice alone had authority here, to pronounce upon matters of the most vital importance. Have the other Crusader princes no rights, no power, in the premises? Will they permit you, unchallenged, to dispose of prisoners of war according to your arbitrary will?"

"I alone am master in Cæsarea," cried Lusignan vehemently, "for I alone have planned and effected its capture!"

"And so," said the princess, fixing her scornful eyes upon him, "since to you is due the sole credit of the success of this enterprise, 'tis to you also we must attribute the violation of the sanctuary in which I had found refuge."

"What, Madam, would you add to the many sins with which you accredit me, the sacrilegious act of an Infidel? In truth, I am most unfortunate to be thus

made a scape-goat to bear the crimes of those whom Your Highness deigns to favor!"

With flashing eyes the princess answered him.

"If the act was another's, the thought which prompted it was yours. Which was the more guilty, I would ask, the Mussulman hand which executed, or the Christian brain which conceived the crime?"

The thrust struck home. Lusignan, conscious of the justice of her taunt, was dumbfounded, his rage increasing with his inability to refute it. The thought that Matilda honored his laurel-wreathed brow far less than the manacled hands of the captive prince, rankled in his soul to such a point that he felt himself capable of the most desperate measures to secure his revenge.

Thus situated, he resolved to avail himself of the advantages circumstance had placed in his power, to compel the princess to be his. He decided not to await the return of Richard, secretly convinced that the great-hearted king, upon becoming acquainted with his intrigues, would deem him unworthy of his friendship, or his sister's hand.

The present opportunity was propitious to his schemes, another might never present itself. He approached the princess with every evidence of a violent agitation. His eye was burning with unholy fires, his voice was hoarse and unsteady.

"Matilda," he said, "I love you with a passion beyond the power of words to express; and I swear to you by the living God, that you must be mine. Only with life itself will I renounce you."

Alarmed at his manner, his words, the princess would have fled from him; but Lusignan grasped her arm.

"No, Matilda," he cried, "you leave me not thus. Long enough have I suffered, restraining my passion within the bounds of an inviolable respect. When your brother had bestowed you upon me, and the Christian world sanctioned our union, I endured your disdain without a murmur. Since I have gained nothing by treating you as a sovereign, perhaps I shall obtain more by availing myself of my authority; and I forewarn you that I shall leave no means untried in order to compel you to yield."

The princess indignantly retorted:

"When Richard delegated his power into your hands, he little thought of the abuse you would make of it!—Oh, Lusignan, I have lived long among the Infidels, but not one of them have I ever known capable of the cowardly act with which, in my very presence, the King of Jerusalem has tarnished his name!"

"Matilda," exclaimed Lusignan imperiously, "do not deceive yourself; the more sensible you render me of your disdain, the more you confirm me in my resolve. Since I have never possessed your love, and you deny me your esteem, what is left for me to lose? Your person. Well, I swear I will not relinquish it. I swear by that God whom we both acknowledge, that if this day you are not mine, to-night my rival will have ceased to exist!"

"Blasphemer!" exclaimed the young girl shudder-

ing, "how dare your lips invoke that holy name as the witness of your criminal purpose?"

"Decide, Matilda," said Lusignan drawing nearer, till his hot breath profaned her cheek; "will you be my wife?"

"Never," she cried, repulsing him; "even the death of Malek Adhel would be less horrible to me than such a marriage! I should be unworthy his love did I hesitate a moment in my choice."

"So be it then; I would have condemned him only to the penalty of beholding in these arms the woman he has dared to dispute with me; but you have decreed him, an unregenerated Infidel, eternal torments — eternal separation!"

White to the lips, he turned away. But his fearful suggestion had aroused the princess to a full sense of the horrors of her position. To the death of him she loved, religion and the approval of her conscience might, perhaps, reconcile her; but for his eternal loss there was no comfort — neither upon this earth, nor in the heavens above. For a moment she wavered. Lusignan saw his advantage and retraced his steps.

"No," she cried, all the spirit of her proud race returning to her aid; "no, the Crusader princes will never permit the consummation of so black a crime! They will rise up against it — they will rise up against you, Lusignan! I will call upon my faithful Englishmen; I will appeal to Albert of Austria, to the Duke of Burgundy, whose loyalty to honor has won him such high proofs of confidence from the French monarch..."

"And neither your vaunted Englishmen, nor yet Albert of Austria, nor the Duke of Burgundy, not even Philip Augustus himself could save the life of Malek Adhel. Not one of them all dare dispute my supremacy in this city, which belongs to me by right of capture."

"When your commands are criminal, no Christian will obey you; and the noble chiefs of our army will know how to prevent you from sullying the glory of their cause with so foul a stain."

"Probably they would attempt it, Matilda," interrupted Lusignan with concentrated rage; "perhaps they might deem their honor concerned in defending the life of their arch-enemy. But I can resort to private means to effect my purpose — means which even the most suspicious would not divine."

"But you could not conceal your crime from the all-seeing eye of God; and if your fellow-men do not hold you accountable, you cannot escape from Heaven's tribunal."

"Matilda," replied Lusignan, kneeling before her, "I know full well the sinfulness of my nature, and the punishment my evil acts will draw down upon me; but remorse, fear, are nothing to the intensity of my desire to possess you — to the horror of beholding you another's. At this moment, overcome by the devouring passion which consumes me, I cannot hesitate between you and Heaven."

His impious words destroyed the last glimmer of hope in the breast of the young girl, — of hope from him; but one last resource remained. If she could not

save the life of Malek Adhel, she might at least be able to effect his conversion.

"Some degree of commiseration," she said disdainfully, "might, perhaps, have lessened the feeling of repugnance with which you inspire me, Lusignan, were it not that through you I find myself reduced to the fearful alternative of choosing between the eternal salvation of one whom I love, and a marriage with one whom I abhor. Before I can decide I must see Malek Adhel..."

"You will not see him," interrupted Lusignan; "I know my hated rival too well to permit such an interview. Rather than purchase his release by consenting to relinquish you, he would embrace your faith, and dying, leave you the hope of a reunion hereafter. No, no," he added moving to the door, "decide now. Your own lips shall pronounce the release or the doom of Malek Adhel."

As she heard him, despair mastered her pride. She rushed forward and threw herself at the king's feet

"Oh, cruel Prince," she cried, "if you have no generous feeling for a defenceless rival, no pity for the woman you profess to love, consider at least your own good. Would you, a Christian, imbrue your hands in the blood of an unarmed man; would you, a knight, tyrannize over a woman, whose sex you have sworn to defend?"

Her veil had become detached by the suddenness of her movement; her dishevelled golden hair, her suppliant attitude, her reproachful eyes, enhanced the elo-

quence of her appeal. Lusignan looked at her and wavered.

"Ask what you will," he said; "ask my life, ask all that I possess or hope to possess hereafter, ask me anything save to renounce you!"

The princess' imploring eyes drooped before his burning gaze. He strove to raise her, but she resolutely refused.

"No, Lusignan," she cried, "on my knees I will plead with you! You must, you shall hear me! Lusignan, I will not deny that you have forfeited my esteem, but you may yet regain it — more, you may win my admiration, my fervent, undying gratitude. If unreasoning passion has for a moment betrayed you, you may yet exalt yourself to a nobler manhood. Lusignan, let these hands which I clasp loosen your rival's chains; let him learn from your own lips that he is free! Compel him by a magnanimous act to acknowledge you his peer in magnanimity! It is heroism I ask of you, but surely you would not prove to me that in believing you capable of it, I expected too much!"

She ceased speaking, but her eloquent eyes still pleaded with him.

The haughty king was moved; his countenance relaxed, the eyes he bent upon her were now more tender than passionate. If he could but have read in that uplifted face the faintest hope of ever winning her love, if one word, one accent of encouragement had but escaped her, he would have yielded. But Matilda had never learned the art of feigning. She offered Lusignan her

admiration, her gratitude, but she could not promise him her love.

Then Lusignan changed his tactics. He implored forgiveness of the woman who, loving, he had so wronged. He attributed to the heat of passion the unmanly threats with which he had endeavored to gain his point. He promised to grant all that she should require of him — he promised, yet she was in no wise reassured. There was something in his tones which disquieted the young girl, and his gracious manner alarmed her more than his anger had done.

Filled with vague forebodings, she kept silence. Presently one of Lusignan's officers entered.

"Sire," he said, "at the tidings of Malek Adhel's capture, all the Crusader chiefs left their tents and have hastened hither. They ask to see you. They desire to know what fate you reserve for your illustrious prisoner. The excitement among them waxes stronger each moment. Hasten, Your Majesty, to reassure them!"

Disconcerted beyond measure, Lusignan prepared to obey a summons he dared not disregard. At the threshold he turned back for one last look at the object of his passionate worship.

"Sire," she said with imploring eyes, "remember your promise!"

"Have no fear, Madam," he replied with a sinister smile that made her tremble and turn pale.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE moment of Malek Adhel's departure from Cæsarea had almost simultaneously been made known to Lusignan. An arrow directed to some given point by his emissary had announced to the wily king the success of his schemes, and the opportunity for their consummation.

Lusignan lost no time in assembling his troops. In a short address he informed them that he had received positive information of Malek Adhel's absence from Cæsarea, and of his intention of taking advantage of that propitious circumstance to renew the assault.

Within an hour the Crusaders' camp was in a state of active preparation. New and formidable machines of war were brought to bear upon the walls of the besieged city. The men, no longer awed by the thought of being opposed to a chief whose invincibility seemed almost superhuman, were imbued with fresh ardor and certainty of success.

When his arrangements were completed, Lusignan sent a herald to request an interview with the acting governor of the city. Mohammed acceded.

"Mohammed," said the king, "I have come in person to assure you that no alternative is left you but that of surrendering the city to me on the spot. Learn that Malek Adhel is in my hands. I surprised him last night, as he was issuing from the city. I demand

Cæsarea as his ransom. Should you refuse, the head of your master falls. I give you one hour to decide."

The king withdrew, and Mohammed, overwhelmed with grief and alarm, convoked an assembly of emirs. They sent a messenger in search of the Christian whose liberty had evidently been the reward of the important tidings which had caused the sudden departure of Malek Adhel. He was nowhere to be found, and it was currently reported that he had escaped from the city and returned to the camp of the Crusaders. This intelligence confirmed Lusignan's words, for it was well known that in receiving his freedom, the Christian captive had asked permission to remain in Cæsarea, lest his countrymen should hold him accountable for the information he had imparted to the enemy

He had returned to them voluntarily, hence there could be no possible doubt of the man's treachery, and of the successful accomplishment of the entire scheme of which his part had been but the preliminary movement.

The Mussulmans no longer hesitated. The life of their prince was at stake. They opened their gates to the enemy.

Astonished at their bloodless victory, the Christians questioned Lusignan. He gave them evasive answers, or attributed the success of his overtures to the pusillanimity of the Infidel leaders.

Lusignan's first care was to place Mohammed in close confinement. He next ordered that no change

should be made in the general aspect of the city and transmural camp; that the banners of the Crescent should remain upon the walls and mosques; that the sentinels upon the ramparts and at the gates should disguise themselves in the Mussulman garb; that quiet and the ordinary routine should prevail.

Such singular precautions—so facile a victory, awakened doubt and misgivings in the minds of the allied princes. The high-minded Duke of Burgundy resenting even an appearance of treachery, demanded of Lusignan an explanation of his actions. The King of Jerusalem haughtily refused.

"By what right," he asked, "do you presume to question the integrity of your chief. Have you not sworn to obey me pending Richard's return? Have you aught to complain of? Have I done aught to injure our cause? Is not Cæsarea ours; and has its conquest caused the spilling of one drop of Christian blood?"

The duke was silenced; as Lusignan had said, he had sworn to recognize in that king the head of the allied forces, the one great object in view, the capture of Cæsarea, had been accomplished, and a mere suspicion of the means whereby that result had been obtained could not warrant him in breaking his pledge; but he openly declared that he would not enter the captured city until Lusignan had rendered an account of the matter, and he retired with his division of French troops to the camp, whence he refused to issue.

But presently he learned that, misled by the decep-

tive aspect of the captured city, Malek Adhel had returned, and had fallen an easy prey into the hands of Lusignan, who had ordered him to be manacled like the lowest criminal.

The loyal knight lost not a moment in hastening to the aid of the Saracen prince. He entered Cæsarea; he sought the Duke of Bavaria, Albert of Austria, and others of the Crusader chiefs, and urged them to exact from Lusignan an account of his intentions in relation to Malek Adhel. He found willing listeners and sympathizing hearts. Together they went to the palace of the king, and it was before this august assembly that Lusignan was forced to appear immediately after his interview with the Princess of England.

With proud and defiant mien he entered the hall where his unwelcome visitors awaited him and demanded their reason for having so honored him.

The Duke of Burgundy took the initiative. He reproached the king with the unfair advantage he had taken over a defenceless warrior.

"You should have overcome him by force of arms," he said; "and not by stratagem."

"Richard, from whom I hold the authority I wield, will be acquainted with my reasons and my plans, on his return," replied Lusignan tranquilly; "to him alone, shall I render an account of my actions."

"Sire," exclaimed the Duke of Burgundy, with some heat, "we are all Christians; the disgraceful acts of one among us reflect upon us all, and honor requires me to question all that threatens to attaint it. I insist,

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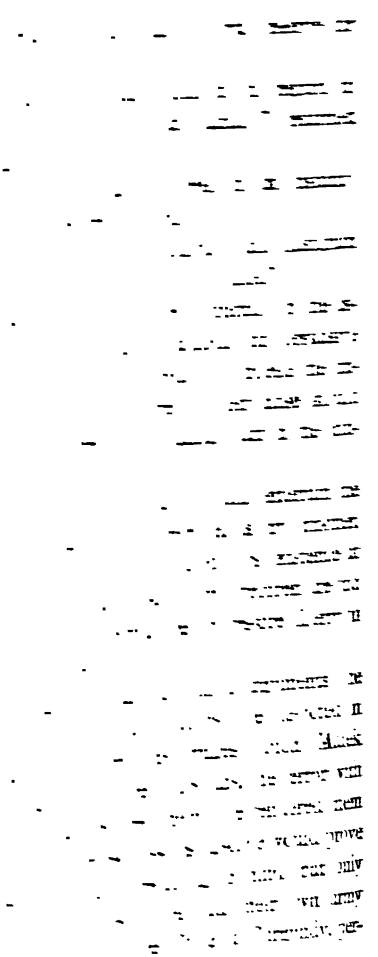

suaded despite himself, began to entertain a d
whether his generous impulse would not have led
into committing a grievous error against the supr
interests of religion.

When Lusignan perceived that the opinions o
hearers were shaken, and that his words had prod
the desired effect, he adopted a more modest tone.

"However important the reasons I have adva
to you, Princes," he added, "my decision is by
means irrevocable; when Richard shall have retu
to claim command, and I shall no longer occupy
responsible position, perhaps I may with a hearty
will unite my voice to yours in asking mercy for M
Adhel; but with Richard alone rests his fate. I
just despatched a messenger to the camp before Asc
to inform the King of England of the taking of Cæs
and of the position in which we find ourselves at pre
According to his reply we shall know how to go
ourselves; meanwhile Malek Adhel will be conv
to Ptolemaïs. Cæsarea is too near the scene of
His life will be far more secure in the peaceful seclu
of the former city; here I could not hold myself
sponsible for it."

Lusignan's counsels prevailed; all opposition
overcome. It was even conceded that, possessing
solute authority in the premises, he had shown m
moderation in his replies to the Duke of Burgundy,
his position towards the Saracen prince being
known, he was likewise applauded for the manne
which he had spoken of his rival. Thus the intrig

king had not only lulled the suspicions to which his equivocal conduct had given rise, but he had won over his most prejudiced opponents to his own views.

That very night Malek Adhel, under a strong guard, was conveyed to Ptolemais.

The following morning Matilda was informed of his departure. She recalled the sinister expression upon Lusignan's countenance when he had parted from her the day before; horrible presentiments beset her. In her anguish of mind she would fain have called to her aid the Archbishop of Tyre; but where that sympathizing friend, that sage counselor, was to be found, she knew not.

Could she but have suspected the errand which kept him from her side, her tears would have ceased to flow and a tranquil assurance have taken the place of the anxious fears which encompassed her.

Conscious of the impossibility of overtaking the abductors of the princess, on the day when the Infidels had broken in so suddenly upon the solemn ceremonies of the sanctuary, the venerable archbishop had tarried awhile, in order to restore peace and a sense of security to the terrified sisterhood of the convent. After his efforts had been rewarded with success, and a short but fervent prayer had been offered by the worthy prelate, William set forth, with his staff for sole protection, to rescue the princess.

He had proceeded some distance in the direction of Cæsarea, when he overtook a detachment of Christians, who had probably passed him, unobserved, in the mazes

of the forest, and who had now halted for their mid-day meal. He joined them, questioning them anxiously about events which might throw some light upon the direction which had been taken by Matilda's abductors.

"Holy Father," replied the officer in command of the party, "Cæsarea is ours; Lusignan is in supreme authority there; the Princess of England is in his palace, and we are now on our return, after conducting Malek Adhel to the dungeons of Ptolemaïs."

The venerable priest was so much moved by these unexpected tidings that his wonted calm deserted him, and his trembling limbs refused him support; he seated himself upon the trunk of a fallen tree, to ponder calmly upon the joyful events he had just learned. The soldiers, now ready to depart, invited the archbishop to continue his journey in their company, but he bade them God-speed; preferring solitude and his own thoughts.

"Thanks be unto Thee, my Heavenly Father," cried William, lifting his clasped hands to heaven: "Cæsarea is in the hands of Thy followers, and my tender lamb is rescued from those of the Infidel!"

But Malek Adhel was lying in a dungeon. At the thought, tears sprang into the eyes of the venerable priest. Misfortune had overtaken his benefactor, in a moment his errors, his obduracy, even his sacrilegious act were forgotten; only his virtues, his generous deeds, were remembered. William did not stop to consider; he did not even ponder the means of effecting his purposes; he resumed his staff and forthwith proceeded toward Ptolemaïs.

When he reached the gates of that city he was informed that the populace, carried away by a blind fury, were threatening to break open the prison and take the life of Malek Adhel. Further on he heard it rumored that the disturbance had been incited by secret emissaries sent thither by Lusignan.

"Please God," murmured the priest, "that so foul a crime has never entered the brain of a soldier of the Cross!"

He hurried on; he reached the prison. The strictest orders had been issued interdicting the admittance of visitors within its gates. But to the man of God, whose mission is one of mercy and of comfort, free access to suffering and sorrow are never refused.

Conducted by the jailer himself, the archbishop descended into the gloomy subterranean regions where were situated the dungeons appropriated to the reception of the vilest criminals.

His sight could not at first pierce the darkness which pervaded the cell into which his guide had conducted and left him; but a deep-drawn sigh indicated the presence of him whom he sought. As William advanced towards the prisoner, the latter started to his feet, his chains clashing together with a sound that caused the archbishop a thrill of horror.

"Is it William of Tyre, who comes to me in my trouble?" asked the subdued voice of Malek Adhel.

"Oh, my son!" cried the old man, tears coursing down his furrowed cheeks, as he clasped the captive to his breast: "Put your trust in God," he added, when

his emotion allowed him utterance. "He will restore you to liberty."

"He cannot restore me my honor!" cried Malek Adhel hoarsely. "In losing that, I have discovered there was on this earth a greater misfortune than losing Matilda."

"My son, God hath power to restore to you far more than you have lost."

"No, no," interrupted the prince; "there is no more peace, no more hope for me in this life! I have betrayed my brother; I have deserted the city he entrusted to my keeping; I have fallen into the snares of a treacherous foe; loaded with irons like the veriest slave, I have been cast into this dungeon to die!"

"You shall not die," cried the archbishop exultantly; "at last the opportunity is mine to acquit myself of a sacred obligation. You shall regain your liberty."

"And what will Lusignan say when he discovers that his prey has escaped?" replied Malek Adhel, a faint glimmer of hope struggling through the gloom of his despair.

"What matter, provided you are safe beyond his reach!"

"But do you know that if I leave this prison it will be to rejoin Saladin, to avenge him and myself, to regain Cæsarea?"

"Rash youth," cried the archbishop reproachfully; "why need you tell me this — I had not questioned you about your future movements!"

"Father," said the Saracen prince, grasping his

hands with affectionate warmth, "I would far rather die here than deceive you. And now, knowing that it is a foe whom you would deliver, do you still desire to restore me to liberty?"

"Was it not you who saved my life at Damascus, at Jaffa! Was it not you who severed my chains at Damietta! Was it not you who constantly restored me to my people, whom I ceased not to urge with all the influence at my command against you and yours, because you were the enemies of the true God! Shall those enemies prove themselves more generous than His chosen people! No; I do not injure the good cause by an act of mercy; for charity makes more converts than conquest. It is my Divine Master himself who bids me save you. Malek Adhel, may this thought stay your arm when it is raised to strike one of His people!"

He unfastened the manacles which bound the captive prince, and clasped in his the hand he had just set free.

"Come, my son," he said, "follow me; I am acquainted with every winding of this gloomy abode. I have visited this prison before, and a prescient Providence permitted me the opportunity for gaining information which will now be available. Many a secret, which kings would ransom with untold treasure, has been entrusted to the keeping of the humble apostle of the Most High; various means, in times like these, when men's passions wax strong, have been conceived whereby secret deeds, both good and evil, have been effected."

The priest proceeded to the other side of the narrow cell and closely inspected the apparently impervious wall of stone masonry, passing his finger slowly along the interstices where the huge blocks of stone were united. Presently he paused, and pressed his finger more firmly against a scarcely perceptible depression in the rock, but no result followed the effort; a second and a third proved as fruitless.

"Lend me the aid of your strength, my son," said the archbishop to the prince, "the aperture has been so long in disuse that the fastenings have grown rusty. There, as I press the secret spring, bear your shoulder against this square of rock."

In silent amazement Malek Adhel obeyed, and presently, after one or two ineffectual efforts, the huge block rolled slowly from its position, and revealed a large square aperture; into this the archbishop entered first, bidding his companion follow in silence.

They groped their way through a dark and narrow passage constructed between the walls dividing the several dungeons of the prison. The route was circuitous, and not a ray of light penetrated to guide their steps; but William proceeded confidently, leading the way; and to Malek Adhel the path which led from chains and a dungeon to life and liberty, was not one of gloom.

As he pursued his way in silence, new and strange thoughts occupied the mind of the young Mussulman. A wise and noble spirit had wrestled with his own, and had prevailed. Yet Malek Adhel would not admit the

fact, even unto himself, until his honor had been retrieved. Cæsarea must be regained, Lusignan punished, ere he could submit to and acknowledge a conviction which would forbid him the fulfilment of duties he deemed sacred.

Presently the archbishop stopped before a massive trap-door, grated with strong iron bars, through which a few feeble rays of light straggled in from the outer day.

"My son," said William, "I would have availed myself of this means of seeking you, but that my arm is too weak to lift this enormous weight. Perhaps yours will not find the difficulty so great."

Malek Adhel lent his powerful strength to the massive door; the chains which confined it broke with a crash from their fastenings, and the last obstacle which restrained him from liberty was overcome.

"My God," cried the archbishop, "and this powerful arm will be opposed to us!"

"Oh good and holy man," exclaimed the impulsive prince, throwing himself at the feet of the archbishop, "have pity — let me depart! When I listen to you, honor's self becomes silent! Do not restrain me longer now — perhaps I will send for you some day; nay, the hour is not far distant when I shall have need of all your loving kindness. Life is a burthen to me now; I am forever parted from Matilda. If I cannot live for her, it will at least be sweet to die near you!"

The archbishop's tears flowed unrestrained. He laid his venerable hands, trembling with emotion, upon the bowed head of the prince.

"May God's blessing descend, my son, with that which my lips pronounce. May He create in you a new intelligence, a new spirit; may you abjure the errors of your past life, and recognize before men Him whose hand hath builded the heavens and the earth and the waters under the earth, and all that in them is. Aye, I feel a prophetic spirit within me, which assures me that the hour of your salvation is near at hand!"

A long silence followed the archbishop's solemn adjuration. Then the good old man spoke again.

"This door," he said, "opens beneath the ramparts of Ptolemaïs near a thicket of sycamores. Seek shelter in its closest recesses until nightfall, then in the darkness cross the open plains and you are safe. Escape from the pursuit of your enemies; but bear this in mind, that wherever you may be, you cannot escape the eye of an all-seeing God; His providence will encompass you according to your deserts."

"Do you not accompany me, Father?" inquired Malek Adhel, after a moment's respectful silence; "surely you do not propose to remain in this gloomy prison! Do you think the Christians will venture to visit upon you their anger at my escape?"

"Fear nothing, Malek Adhel. Excess of zeal may have prompted them to restrain your liberty in order to prevent you from aiding their enemies; but to the noble followers of Christ, magnanimity is more pleasing than prudence. There is not one of them but will rejoice to learn that you are free; not one but will thank me for having dared to render you so."

"Ah, that all your people were, indeed, as you believe them to be! But at least I may honor a faith which has developed such rare qualities in natures like yours, holy Father, and that of the Princess Matilda. — Matilda," he added, with filling eyes; "shall I never more behold her!"

"Never," said the archbishop severely; "you whose impious hand was raised against the power of the Eternal, see how He has brought to naught your arrogant pretensions! Matilda belongs to God; to Him she will return. Think of her no more."

"Ere long I shall obey you, Father; ere long she may leave a world where Malek Adhel will no longer live to mourn for her. Tell her I return the pledge I exacted of her; that I even ask her to give herself to God. She will understand this request; she will know that it is my last farewell."

He turned away to hide an emotion which unmanned him.. When he had recovered his habitual self-possession, he came back to the archbishop and grasped his hand.

"Father," he said, "I thank you for this, as for many other acts of kindness and forbearance. Farewell; if we never meet again in this life, promise me that you will come sometimes to shed a few tears of regret — to pray to your God beside my grave!"

Without trusting himself to await a reply, he crossed the threshold and hastened to seek the shelter of the neighboring thicket.

The archbishop watched him until he had disap-

peared from view; then, murmuring prayers for the safety of the fugitive, he turned back, closing the door after him, and calmly retraced his steps.

On reaching the dungeon, William seated himself in the place which Malek Adhel had so recently occupied. He shuddered as he lifted the heavy irons which had confined the illustrious prisoner, asking God to forgive the perpetrators of this outrage. In silent prayer and meditation he awaited the result of his daring act. He had not many moments of suspense to endure. Suddenly the noise of hurrying footsteps and fierce cries broke the deathlike stillness; the door of the dungeon was thrown violently open, and a vast concourse of people from the lowest dregs of humanity appeared at the entrance. In their hands they bore torches, whose flames shed a lurid light upon the scene. The leaders of the rabble, heedless of the cries of piteous entreaty from the jailer, rushed into the dismal chamber; like famished beasts of prey they sought their victim. They found only the man of God, calm and serene, awaiting them.

"Whom seek you, fellow-Christians?" he asked.

"The Saracen!" they shouted fiercely; "the Saracen who has massacred our wives, our brothers, our children; the man who wrested Jerusalem from our hands!"

"He is no longer here," replied William; "I have taken his sins upon my own head; I have charged myself with the responsibility of his iniquity. If you must have blood, behold your victim!"

The rabble shrank back abashed before the grand old man; gentler emotions succeeded to those of violence. Nevertheless, one bolder than his fellows presently cried out:

"Who has set the Infidel free?"

"Who?" replied William, his venerable face irradiated by a holy enthusiasm; "He who hath sent me 'to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound!'"

The rabble, ignorant of the secret entrance to the dungeon, were overawed, convinced of the miraculous interposition of God, they beheld in the saintlike priest the angel of deliverance directly commissioned by his divine Master to circumvent their evil designs. Hearts inaccessible to the tender emotions of mercy, or to the more heroic ones of sympathy and admiration for a fallen hero, were overcome now by the moral force of that master-mind whose influence was acknowledged throughout the Christian world.

With the reaction which usually succeeds to a violent outbreak on the part of an excited populace, an enthusiasm of affection, almost as appalling as their animosity, now inspired these rough men. They would have lifted the venerable archbishop upon their shoulders and borne him through the streets in triumph; but with a calm majesty that overawed their nearer approach, he refused the proffered tribute, bidding them, rather, keep silence upon an event which could but redound to their own discredit. They had entered the

dismal dungeon maddened by their brutal instincts, thirsting for blood; they left it with shame, if not repentance in their hearts.

CHAPTER XXV.

It seemed, in those days of excitement and quickly-thronging events, as though the Christians, in order to cancel the effect of the crime of one among their number, vied with each other in the performance of generous deeds.

While William, hazarding his life to save Malek Adhel's, yet spared thought for the fame which Lusignan's act had threatened to tarnish, Richard, from his camp before Ascalon, thus wrote to the King of Jerusalem:

"Injurious rumors are afloat concerning you. I will credit none of them. My brother-in-arms may be accused, but guilt is impossible to him. And yet, through what strange emergency has he found himself compelled to load with irons a prince — a hero, who has twice given me life and liberty? Lusignan holds supreme authority, and yet Malek Adhel is a prisoner! Nay, I cannot believe what they tell me; rather, while I pen these lines, Malek Adhel is rejoining his brother, and Lusignan marching hither to aid me in overcoming him upon the field of battle!"

In the midst of the forest, whose intricacies he threaded in silence, Malek Adhel encountered a de-

tachment of Christian soldiers. He was unarmed, and he gave himself up for lost.

Their leader advanced towards him with uncovered head. The Saracen prince, recognizing the Duke of Burgundy, felt reassured.

"Unfortunate Prince," said the duke, "it is you whom I was seeking. Since your departure from Cæsarea, a thousand fears have beset me. I would have followed you to ensure your safety, but Lusignan ordered me to remain in camp, and unfortunately I had sworn to recognize his authority until Richard's return. But yesterday, the Princess Matilda, overcoming her habitual reserve, summoned me to a private interview. 'Let us not suspect Lusignan of evil intentions,' she said to me, 'but he who has twice given life and liberty to my brother and to the queen, is in the power of an excitable populace. Not a knight is there to watch over his safety.' These few words were sufficient. The commands of the princess were more imperative than Lusignan's orders; for every true knight owes his first duty to woman, his first care to the defenseless. Accompanied by yon detachment of my brave Frenchmen, I set forth with all speed for Ptolemaïs. You were no longer there. Something they told me of sedition, of a miracle; but the name of William, interthreading these vague reports, reassured me as to your safety. Nevertheless, I was resolved to discover the direction you had taken, in order if necessary, to protect your flight. I surmised that you had gone to rejoin your brother: that was the path of honor,

therefore it must be your own; and here, indeed, have I found you. Here is a horse, here are arms. Go, noble Prince; resume your high station in Saladin's army. I shall proceed first to inform the Princess Matilda that her commands have been fulfilled; then I will hasten to meet you in honorable combat upon the field of Ascalon."

"Aye; we will meet there, once more," replied Malek Adhel, deeply touched; "but since, humbled as I am, you have not deemed me unworthy to bear your knightly sword, will you not also give me your helmet in place of my own? I shall recognize it on the battle-field, and thereby be enabled to refrain from unknowingly shedding the blood of my friend."

Malek Adhel reached Ascalon without further delay or hindrance. As he entered the city he observed that the most profound dejection and anxiety prevailed; the streets he traversed were wrapt in gloom and silence; the people, ordinarily so joyous at his coming, recognized him, but gave no welcome. He entered his brother's palace.

"Oh, Malek Adhel," cried Saladin with bitter reproach vibrating in his tones: "when I entrusted Cæsarea to your keeping, it was not thus I expected to see you again!"

Humbly, with flushing brow and downcast eyes, Malek Adhel answered.

"I am guilty, indeed, Saladin; I have disgraced the glorious name of the Ayoubites; I am no longer worthy to be called your brother. I have betrayed

my most sacred duties, my most solemn pledges. Lusignan commands at Cæsarea. He is master of the stronghold you committed into my keeping — Lusignan!"

He stopped suddenly, as though words were powerless to express the emotions which swelled his heart. The severe lines upon the sultan's countenance somewhat softened.

"Tell me," he said, "by what miracle of Eblis * Lusignan succeeded in displacing you."

Malek Adhel gave his brother the details of the treacherous means through which Lusignan had effected the fall of Cæsarea. He did not spare himself. He confessed the errors he had committed, the weakness which had betrayed him. So excessive indeed, was his remorse, that he saw no extenuating circumstance whatsoever in his conduct; and as he beheld himself, so he revealed himself to the sultan.

"Witnesses of the matter," said Saladin gravely, when his brother had concluded; "victims of your imprudence, had already related these circumstances to me, but they had given a less culpable aspect to your actions. Mohammed and Kaled, here present, in bewailing your errors, deemed them not without excuse."

"Mohammed and Kaled here! They live; they are free! Ah, blessed be the hand which has delivered them! I had thought that joy could no more enter my soul, yet now I may rejoice; for their blood at least does not lie at my door."

* The Evil One. *Al Koran.*

"We should indeed be most ungrateful," said Kaled, "did we not openly acknowledge that, with the exception of Lusignan, the Christians have shown themselves humane, and even generous, in their conduct towards us. The Crusader princes unanimously demanded of Lusignan the release of the prisoners taken at Cæsarea; but ere their request had been complied with, our own chains were severed by an unknown hand; which, we subsequently learned, was one no less illustrious than that of the Princess of England."

Malek Adhel's eager eyes were suddenly lowered; he had resolved to steel his heart against a love which had been his undoing, and at the bare mention of her name his pulses throbbed with the same undying passion.

Saladin watching him attentively, perceived the emotion he vainly endeavored to repress, and hastened to change the drift of his thoughts.

"What plans have you formed, Malek Adhel?" he asked gravely; "what reparation can you offer your injured country?"

"Assemble the captains of your army. Mohammed will cite before them our misfortune and the errors from which it has resulted. Hearken to their judgment, Saladin, and pronounce, accordingly, my doom."

The sultan consented. He ascended his throne. The emirs and the chiefs of the army ranged themselves around him. Malek Adhel refused to be seated. He remained standing, like the veriest criminal, before his judges; yet upon his downcast countenance a certain

tion; and when Lusignan returned to receive my answer to his demand, I yielded him the keys of the city upon the sole condition that you as well as the citizens of Cæsarea, should be at liberty. He pledged himself to this effect, the traitor! — His first act upon entering the city was to issue orders that I should be thrown into a dungeon. Alas, a greater sorrow awaited me! I learned one day by chance from my jailer, that Lusignan had led me to betray my trust, even as he had done our prince, through false representations. I was told that Malek Adhel had not fallen into the hands of the treacherous Christian until after my own act had enabled him to complete his artful plot. Unwilling to risk the lives of his soldiers in an open combat, they told me—but rather, I am convinced, in order to carry out to its utmost limits a scheme so agreeable to his crafty nature—Lusignan ordered that no apparent change in the aspect of the city or camp beyond, should warn you of impending danger. His ruse succeeded. You fell into his snare. I know not, however, whether I may conclude from your presence among us that he was faithful at least to a part of his promise."

Malek Adhel silently shook his head.

Saladin rose to his feet. A solemn silence fell upon the scene.

"To whomsoever you are indebted for your liberty, Malek Adhel," he said, "matters little. Your first duty is to your country. Speak now. Acquaint us with your plans for the future."

"Saladin," Malek Adhel answered gravely, "after that fatal night, when I beheld these hands loaded with ignominious chains, the Princess of England cast by my own act into the power of Lusignan, Cæsarea fallen, my brother betrayed, my glory tarnished, think you I would have hesitated to relieve myself of an existence from which every beacon-star had been quenched? Nay; one hope, one duty, yet remained to me, Saladin; that of retrieving the wrong I have done my brother and my sovereign."

"Then duty shall at last triumph over an unworthy passion; my brother will regain the high estate from which he has fallen, and lead my armies to more glorious victories!"

"Saladin," said the prince, his voice thick with emotion, "do not overwhelm me thus with a generosity of which I have already proved myself unworthy. Where your interests are at stake, I cannot avail myself of your clemency; nay, the utmost severity with which you could treat me, would better assuage my pain. Let me rather hide my shame in the ranks of your humblest soldiers, deeming myself fortunate if they, whose fidelity is beyond suspicion, whose honor is without reproach, will receive me among them!"

"Emirs, princes, captains; you who represent the people, the nobles, the soldiers of our realm," cried Saladin, addressing those whom he had summoned to the trial of the prince; "if among you but one voice is raised to condemn Malek Adhel, to declare him unworthy of resuming command over our armies, we

pledge ourselves to pay heed to that voice rather than to that of fraternal affection."

He looked upon the strong, bearded faces upturned to his; not a dry eye met his gaze. Then from lip to lip was caught the glad acclaim.

"Long live Malek Adhel, our prince, our glorious chief! May he test our loyalty on many a victorious field!"

Tears, which not all his misfortunes had been able to wring from the proud heart of Malek Adhel, sprang now at the magic touch of affection.

"My brother," he said, "and you, my friends true and tried, I accept your generous trust. I shall not again prove unworthy of it. I have buried in the past the hopes, the happiness of my life. From this hour I am born again to a new existence; to my country and to my sovereign I dedicate it; when they shall need me no more, then . . ."

He stopped abruptly, Saladin passed his arm within his own, leaning upon him, and together the brothers entered an adjoining cabinet, there to concert together plans for another, a decisive campaign.

A few days more, and the fate of war must proclaim to the world whether the Orient should yield submission to the Crescent of the Prophet, or to the standard of the Cross.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SWIFT-FOOTED Rumor fled in advance of William of Tyre, anticipated his arrival in Cæsarea, and reported the escape of Malek Adhel from the dungeon of Ptolemaïs, but the name of his rescuer remained a secret confined to the breast of him who had performed the deed.

But Lusignan's quick intuitions penetrated the mystery; he readily divined what man of all others would dare to brave his orders. He knew that the Archbishop of Tyre, whose ecclesiastical rights invested him with a power superior even to that of kings, would not allow a subrogated authority to prevent him from performing an act of mercy or of justice. But Lusignan was likewise aware that William, who, laboring for the approval of his Divine Master cared nothing for the praise of man, would never claim the credit of a good deed, even should that deed be attributed to another. Since Malek Adhel had escaped the snare he had laid for him, the wily king determined to secure all possible advantage from the situation. He dared to arrogate to himself an act of magnanimity, causing it to be rumored throughout the army that although, as a sovereign and judge, justice had not permitted him to restore the Saracen prince to liberty; yet, as a knight, he had acknowledged the claim of a fallen foe upon his generosity, and had charged the archbishop with the mission of privately delivering Malek Adhel from captivity.

The Crusaders heard these rumors with surprise, many with suspicion; they reached the ears of William upon his entrance into Cæsarea, but to all questions addressed to him he maintained silence. Then he sought Lusignan in his palace.

Hitherto proud and arrogant, the King of Jerusalem became anxious, almost humble, in the presence of the venerable prelate. To William's reproaches he dared not oppose falsehood and he acknowledged his faults with a semblance of contrition which in no wise deceived the penetrating eye of his hearer. He confessed that an ungovernable passion had beguiled him, step by step, into the commission of grave errors, which could not now be openly acknowledged without forever losing him the respect of the Crusaders. He endeavored to convince the prelate that the interests of their cause required concealment of the faults of the least among the Christians, still more those of their sovereigns — those of the chiefs of their army. He assured William that only the credit of the generous act, attributed to him, could allay the suspicions and ill-will which were rife in the army against him. He even presumed so far as to implore the prelate to confirm the report which so generally prevailed that Malek Adhel was indebted for his liberty to a private order from himself. But the archbishop would hear no more.

"Cease, Lusignan," he said; "I may, like my Divine Master be the friend of the sinner, but never of sin."

"But may not mine be cancelled, holy Father?"

Then, with all the eloquence at his command, Lusig-

nan announced to the prelate the vast projects he had conceived, the conquered provinces he should some day offer to the Christian world as an expiation for his sins; he dwelt upon the details of his anticipated successes with ill-concealed satisfaction. The archbishop heard him to the end. When he had concluded, William answered with a gravity of demeanor which convinced Lusignan of the futility of his endeavors to bias or deceive him.

"The mortification of losing your kingdom has not sufficed, it seems, Lusignan, to humble your pride or to awaken within you that modesty which beseems a follower of Christ. At the slightest victory, without pausing even to consider the means through which it has been acquired, your arrogance passes all the bounds of decency, and your pretensions hesitate not before the highest flights of imagination. What road oh, Christian king, have you chosen by which to regain your throne? Artifice and treachery.— Nevertheless I shall not publish your shame abroad; but I shall maintain a close watch upon all your movements. While respecting in you the representative of a noble race and the purple of royalty, I shall know how to annihilate this earthly greatness, should you avail yourself of it to injure your fellow-beings. I shall judge you, not as a king, but as a man, and should you prove a second time guilty, I shall not hesitate to reveal your true character to the world, that knowing you, men may despise and avoid you."

Lusignan endeavored to conceal the chagrin which oppressed him. While affecting the most humble con-

trition, he was pondering means of ridding himself of a witness whose penetrating eye he could not deceive, whose stern justice he could not escape. With anxious misgivings he saw the archbishop enter the apartments of Matilda, or hold converse with the Crusader princes; he was in a constant fever of suspense lest the secret of his evil deeds in some unguarded moment should be betrayed. His fears increased upon the return of the Duke of Burgundy. Of the confederate princes, he of all others caused him most anxiety. In fact, upon hearing the rumor that Malek Adhel was indebted for his liberty to Lusignan, the Duke of Burgundy was fain to give the lie direct; but when it was added that the archbishop himself did not refute the assertion, he, too, kept silence, considering that in the possible event of its truth he should not deny due credit to a generous act, from whatever source it might emanate; and if false, as he believed, he should respect a silence for which William himself had set the example.

In his camp before Ascalon Richard did not fail to learn that Malek Adhel had rejoined his brother; that he had reassumed command over the armies of the Crescent, and was hastening preparations for a renewal of hostilities.

Richard immediately sent to request that Lusignan would march with all his forces to his assistance. He expressed approbation of the conduct of the King of Jerusalem towards the Saracen prince, and deeming that neither the monastery of Carmel, nor Cæsarea—which Malek Adhel had sworn to retake—offered sufficient se-

curity for the Princess Matilda, he desired his sister to accompany Lusignan to the camp before Ascalon.

The King of Jerusalem repeated the orders of Richard to the army and to the Princess of England. The former received them with rejoicing, the latter with a resignation from which all personal feeling of hope or regret was banished. The archbishop accompanied her upon the journey.

Richard welcomed his brother-in-arms with unfeigned cordiality. No suspicion had arisen to reflect upon the deeds of valor and magnanimity which rumor had attributed to Lusignan. The King of England, among whose qualities diffidence of judgment formed no part, never wearied, while praising his friend to Matilda, to vaunt his own superior insight into the merits of one she had so wilfully depreciated.

Lusignan, when happening to be present on such occasions, had the grace to blush; Matilda kept silence. She had resolved to reveal to none those truths which would, if known, forever tarnish his knightly fame. With cold and impassive countenance she heard her brother's enthusiastic praise of his friend; vainly he endeavored to move her, still more vain was his attempt to awe her into submission to his plans. One who has drained the cup of sorrow to the dregs, and who has renounced all hope, has nought to fear.

Having learned from William that Malek Adhel was at liberty and occupied with salutary thoughts, having received release from the promise she had given him, Matilda felt that the world had now no further

claim upon her, and devoted herself to preparation for assuming vows which would forever separate her from its joys, its sorrows, and its interests. She announced her decision to Richard. The fresh laurels which Lusignan had entwined about his brows had inspired the English king with renewed hope of his sister's acquiescence to a union he so much desired. He received her announcement with no small degree of irritation. Her eyes sought the ground with a meek deference in which was no visible sign of emotion.

Surprised at her tranquillity, he inquired whether his anger no longer had terrors for her.

"I regret its effects for you, Sire," she answered calmly, "but for myself I have no fear. My fate is decided; death alone can change it, and death has no terrors for me."

Richard was struck with the firmness hidden beneath so gentle a manner; he began to yield to a higher moral ascendency, to behold in her over whom the world had lost all power, a likeness to the angels of Heaven.

Lusignan no longer dared to give expression to the passion which consumed him; an importunity which neither pride nor delicacy of feeling had heretofore restrained, was silenced now by the dread of inducing Matilda, in order to rid herself of him, to betray what he had so much interest in concealing. But that very patience and apparent consideration redounded to his advantage and secured him sympathy, while all wondered at Matilda's unaccountable reserve. She

heard these reproaches without evincing either surprise or regret. Content with the approval of the archbishop, to whom her inmost thoughts were known, she paid slight heed to undeserved censure from that world in which she soon should take no part.

Scarcely two days after the reorganization of the army, of which Richard was once more commander-in-chief, the Mussulman battalions were observed issuing from the gates of Ascalon. At this signal for a resumption of hostilities, the Crusaders prepared for the impending battle.

The King of Jerusalem, alone with his esquire in the privacy of his tent, confided to him his troubles. This man, the same to whom Lusignan had entrusted the dangerous but inglorious mission which had resulted in the betrayal of Malek Adhel and the capture of Cæsarea, was a fitting tool for the hand of an unscrupulous master. A slave to a cupidity to which Lusignan was ready to minister with lavish hand in the accomplishment of his schemes, he yielded him implicit and unquestioning obedience in all things.

"Listen," said Lusignan; "this important day has but one aim for me. I must meet Malek Adhel. I do not grudge to receive death at his hands, if so my evil fate ordains; but he must not survive me. Keep close to me throughout the battle; never leave my side. If I manage to beguile him from his comrades, follow. If I obtain victory over him, remain inactive; but if I fall, I count upon your fidelity. Remember, Malek Adhel must not survive me."

It was on Wednesday, the fourth of October, that the army of the Crusaders quitted their camp near Ascalon to meet that of Saladin.*

The Christians spread their forces in the plain between the river Belus and the sea. The King of England, before whom was carried a Bible resting upon a velvet cushion over which was borne a canopy of cloth of gold sustained at each corner by four officers of rank, occupied the left wing with the English and the Hospitallers. The Marquis of Montferrat commanded the right, having under him the Venetians and the Lombards; Lusignan the centre, with the Landgrave of Thuringia, the French and the Pisans. Gerard of Biderford, Grandmaster of the Templars, the Duke of Guelders and the Catalans formed the corps of reserve, while Geoffrey de Lusignan, brother of the king, and James d'Avesnes, had been left behind to guard the camp. The Archbishops of Pisa, of Canterbury, of Ravenna, of Besançon, and of Nazareth; the Bishops of Beauvais, of Salisbury, of Ptolemaïs, and of Bethlehem, had likewise assumed arms and joined the combatants.

Richard, surveying his magnificent army, cried aloud in his exultant pride:

"O God, be Thou neutral and victory is ours!"

The two armies advanced with equal ardor. By degrees the space which intervened between them lessened. Then visors were lowered, lances were poised, horses were put to their mettle. Christians and Mus-

* The disposition of this battle, as well as the words of Richard upon this occasion, are historical.

sulmans met, rank to rank, face to face; sword crossed sword, javelin struck javelin. From the midst of the shock of the meeting armies a heavy cloud of dust arose, enveloping the combatants and obscuring the light of day; while the surrounding hills and valleys re-echoed with the sound of clashing arms, and neighing of horses, with shouts of triumph and groans of agony, concomitants of battle.

Lusignan's arms carried death before him. Disappointed at not finding him whom he sought, his rage redoubled the strength of his blows.

While he was victorious in the centre, Richard was also successful at the left; but the Marquis of Montferrat, commanding the right, had been repulsed by Saladin. Nevertheless, victorious at two points, the Christians had gained vantage. They pursued their victory with an impetuous courage almost unparalleled; when suddenly Malek Adhel was seen in their rear, leaving carnage and ruin in his wake. Wherever the Christians seemed most elated, most successful, there flew Malek Adhel, inexorable as the god of battles, and snatched their laurels from their grasp. The fortunes of the day rapidly changed sides; the heroic courage, no less than the consummate skill of Malek Adhel in the disposition of his forces, ensured him eventual success.

Lusignan, enraged at beholding so brilliant a victory deserting his standard for that of his detested rival, determined upon putting his preconcerted plans into instant execution, hoping by removing Malek Adhel from the immediate scene of conflict to give the Chris-

turns opportunity to rally and recover their advantage, while he sought redress for his own private grievances. He might be amused Lusignan well knew, but Malek Adhel would not survive him — so one had sworn who had never yet broken his vow.

With such-like menace Lusignan called upon the Saracen prince. Malek Adhel heard him, but with every pulse throbbing with eager impatience, he paid no heed. Astonished at his impassibility, the King of Jerusalem spurred the flanks of his charger and overtook him. Malek Adhel, perceiving his design, turned from the only Christian among them all whose life he would gladly have taken. He had determined to pursue his private animosity this day to share the general interests of a battle whose responsibility chiefly devolved upon himself.

But Lusignan, equally determined to effect his purpose, persistently followed, overwhelming him with insulting epithets. At last the heroic prince was no longer able to endure the outrage; indignation gaining the mastery over prudence, he imagined that a few moments would suffice to forever silence his insolent enemy, and that he could return to the scene of conflict ere his absence had been noted.

"Come then," he said to Lusignan, "let us hasten to quench in our blood the mortal hatred which burns within us."

The King of Jerusalem followed, but not alone, and his esquire had not forgotten his orders.

Malek Adhel stopped in the rear of a mass of rock

which concealed them from view, and threw aside his buckler.

"Let us discard means of defence," he said, "which but retard the issue of this contest. Rather let us hasten the auspicious moment when one or the other of us will have ceased to breathe."

Lusignan followed his example. He dropped his buckler and drew his sword. The conflict began. Never had Lusignan evinced such valor, never had he been more confident of success; for Malek Adhel was already wounded. On the battle-field he had spared so little thought to the preservation of his life, that his blood had flowed freely, and its loss had weakened the strength of his arm. But this disadvantage was compensated for by a courage which even Lusignan's could not surpass, could scarcely equal. Watching his opportunity, he grasped his sword in both hands and dealt his opponent a furious blow upon the head. Lusignan staggered; his helmet, severed in two pieces, fell to the ground; his eyes were suffused with blood. Malek Adhel, perceiving that his head was defenseless, cast away his own helmet, and stayed his blows until his enemy had sufficiently recovered to stand upon his guard. But scarcely had Lusignan recovered from his momentary stupor, than he threw himself without warning, and with so rapid a movement, upon the prince, that the latter had not time to parry his thrust, and received the sword of his adversary in his thigh. The life-current rushed tumultuously from the gaping wound. Lusignan, encouraged by the sight, redoubled

his exertions. But Malek Adhel, now upon his guard, recovered the advantage he had lost, and in turn drew blood from his opponent. Then Lusignan suddenly changed his manœuvres: he forbore attacking, contenting himself with a defensive attitude; he eluded the heavy blows of Malek Adhel, circling around him with dazzling rapidity, endeavoring thus to exhaust by fatigue and loss of blood the strength which he perceived was fast ebbing.

Finally Malek Adhel wearied of a contest whose issue was still so uncertain, and anxious for its termination discarded his sword, and drawing his poinard rushed upon Lusignan. They struggled, they closed, clasping each other in a deadly embrace. At length Malek Adhel gained a final advantage; he crushed his adversary in his iron grasp with such force that the latter measured his length upon the ground without breath or motion. Malek Adhel threw himself upon him, raising his poinard to strike.

"Oh, Malek Adhel, one word. . ." murmured Lusignan.

The prince stayed his hand to hear him; but the King of Jerusalem, ere he could utter another word, fell back unconscious.

Were he indeed no more, another blow was useless; but if he had only swooned, Malek Adhel's was not the hand to strike a defenseless and unconscious foe. The weapon dropped by his side.

But the esquire of Lusignan who had witnessed the contest, perceiving that his master had fallen, remem-

bered his promise. He rushed forward, and ere Malek Adhel had regained his feet, he plunged his dagger into his breast.

Thus surprised, yet true to his warrior instincts, the Saracen prince turned to repay the dastardly blow; but exhausted by fatigue and loss of blood, he faltered and fell to the ground; his eyes closed; his white lips, murmuring the name "Matilda," grew pale and rigid; the warrior whose very name had been a synonym of strength to his friends, of terror to his enemies, lay without power of thought or motion upon the sward.

A sudden fear possessed the esquire. The inanimate clay before him was powerless now — laid low by his own treacherous hand; but his superstitious nature recoiled with a nameless dread at the thought of the dauntless spirit hovering near the spirit of Malek Adhel, to whose marvellous deeds many attributed occult dealings with the Evil One.

The murderer would have fled the fatal spot; but in his guilty heart one redeeming quality still remained — fidelity to his master; the body of Lusignan must be transported to the camp.

Looking about him he perceived a young shepherd who had taken refuge with his flock of goats, among the rocks. He hailed him, compelling him by dint of promises and threats, to assist him in bearing the body of his master to the Crusaders' camp.

As they wended their way, a fresh cause for alarm occurred to the esquire. Could the boor, from some place of concealment among the rocks, have observed

his deed? Would a witness arise to fix his crime upon him? He stopped abruptly, and throwing policy to the winds, angrily demanded of the youth his object in spying upon his actions: the latter, terrified in turn, sought immunity in falsehood, and with an assumption of stolidity which effectually misled his interlocutor, asserted that he had but just reached the spot, in search of his flock, when he had heard the summons.

As they neared the battle-field they encountered Christians, in squads and singly, flying across the plain.

"Then all is lost!" exclaimed the esquire, halting a common soldier as he was passing.

"Lusignan has disappeared," was the answer; "and Saladin and Malek Adhel are victorious."

"You mistake; Malek Adhel is no more; he has but just succumbed before my master's superior prowess. We are even now bearing the King of Jerusalem, covered with wounds, to camp."

The Christians, wild with joy, could scarce credit the encouraging tidings. From lip to lip the watchword was passed:

"Malek Adhel is no more!"

Even unto the field of battle where the conflict still continued; into the midst of the contending armies, the rumor flew. The Mussulmans, horror-stricken, faltered in their onward march to victory; the Christians, elated at an event which so weakened the strength of the enemy, were infused with new hopes, fresh courage, and once more assumed the aggressive.

Saladin, hitherto victorious—Saladin, always master

of himself, in peril or in pain, now succumbed to grief. The loss of his brother absorbed all other thought; his empire, his glory, all were forgotten for the moment. When he succeeded in shaking off the lethargy which had enthralled his senses when the fatal news was first broken to him, it was too late. His army had been repulsed and decimated. Sullenly he ordered a retreat, and fell back towards Ascalon, where he shut himself in with his grief and the remnant of his once powerful army.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RUMORS of victory had already reached the Crusaders' camp, when Lusignan's esquire entered it, bearing the body of his master. The inanimate form of the King of Jerusalem was borne to his tent, his esquire following, with an agitation he vainly endeavored to suppress.

Meanwhile the shepherd youth, his services no longer required, had withdrawn into the crowd which had gathered about the spot. After the curtains of the tent had closed upon the wounded king and his attendants, the throng of idlers whose curiosity sense of sight had not satisfied, surrounded the stranger who had assisted in the transportation of Lusignan, and began to question him with an eager interest devoid of unfriendliness, which insensibly won upon the naturally loquacious youth. By degrees they drew from him

a description of the scene which he had witnessed from an overhanging cliff. His audience held their breath with awe as they learned of the prolonged and terrible struggle which had taken place between the two bravest men of the contending armies; but when, with some hesitation, and no little evidence of trepidation, the youth revealed to them the crime which had ended the days of the Saracen prince, a cry of horror escaped the lips of his hearers.

Meanwhile, Geoffrey de Lusignan, beholding his brother's situation, summoned the speedy attendance of the surgeons and the clergy.

The Archbishop of Tyre hurried to the tent of the wounded king; hoping, in the event of his restoration to consciousness, to be enabled to offer spiritual aid, should the cares of the surgeons prove ineffectual in preserving his life.

But strange rumors had reached Matilda, as with prayers and tears she awaited within her tent the issue of the battle; rumors that Lusignan had just been brought in, wounded unto death by the hand of Malek Adhel.

Fearful must have been the encounter she knew, between two men who hated each other with so bitter a hatred. Overcoming her natural reserve the young princess quitted her retreat and hastened out to obtain more definite information. Midway between her tent and that of the King of Jerusalem she encountered a group of soldiers engaged in animated discussion; as she drew nearer she observed that the countenances of

the men bore evidence of some strong emotion, to which was quickly added an expression of respectful sympathy when they recognized her.

She stopped to question them.

But the throng parted in silence, and the shepherd who had revealed the dread tidings was pushed forward. Emboldened by the interest with which his recital had been previously received, the youth repeated his story.

No cry of horror, no groan of indignation, rewarded him now: — only the lips of the princess were cold and blue as those of the dead; and her tearless eyes, fixed on vacancy, seemed to have been suddenly deprived of the light of life.

"Your Highness, there may be some mistake," said one of the men with a sudden inspiration; "the King of Jerusalem seemed to have scant chance for shrift when they bore him past, a moment since; yet they say he still breathes."

The words had their effect. All the firmness of her heroic race came to the aid of Richard's sister.

"Where is the Archbishop of Tyre?" she asked.

The man who had given her the first words of comfort pointed out the tent of Lusignan, and stepped forward to summon the prelate. But Matilda anticipated his intention, and entered before him.

At sight of her white, awe-stricken countenance, the archbishop quitted the side of the still unconscious man, and joined her as she stood within the entrance of the tent.

"What are you doing here, my child?" he inquired kindly; "I much fear that Lusignan is beyond even the succor of religion."

"Have you not heard that Malek Adhel has fallen?" she asked

"Malek Adhel? — and by the hand of Lusignan?"

"By the hand of an assassin," she answered, raising her hand slowly, solemnly, like an implacable fate, towards the guilty esquire. "Malek Adhel, victorious over Lusignan, has been undone by foul means."

The swiftness with which his crime had overtaken him; the mysterious manner in which it seemed to have been revealed to the woman whom it was generally known was the object of his victim's ardent worship; more powerfully still, the pale stern majesty of his accuser, wrought upon the superstitious terrors of the guilty man. He cowered, shivering as with an ague, beside his master's bed.

"Come," said the archbishop sternly; "follow me."

The man obeyed. The prelate led the way into an adjoining tent.

"Speak now," he said, "and quickly."

The wretched esquire cast himself at William's feet.

"Have mercy upon me!" he cried, piteously; "my hand indeed performed the act; but my master's commands required it of me!"

The archbishop and the princess gave a quick start of horror.

"Lusignan?"

"The same, my lord! Oh, pardon a deed which obedience exacted from me!"

William heard the confession with inexpressible dismay. But the situation of the princess presently recalled him to himself. Her very reason seemed threatened; she stood, cold and rigid, without relief of tear or moan; immovable as a marble statue. The archbishop took her icy hand in his.

"Courage, my child," he said tenderly; "it may not yet be too late; the aim of the assassin is not always sure."

"If but one breath of life remains within him," cried Matilda, with a sudden animation, "his spirit will return at my despairing cry! — If Malek Adhel is no more; if his noble virtues and acts of self-denial are to be rewarded with eternal punishment, O God, where would be the justice upon which we rely; the truth which we seek in Thy revelations! . . . ."

"My child," interrupted the archbishop; "die of your grief if you must, but do not blaspheme!"

"Have I done so, Father? I scarce know what I say! But let us go; let us not waste more precious moments. To save him I will even follow the guidance of his assassin."

"Willingly, my child," said the old man, signing to the esquire to precede them.

Hastily gathering together a few simples and herbs used for dressing wounds, the archbishop followed the impatient steps of the young princess. It was already night; but the full moon shone brightly down upon the

camp, and across the broad sweep of table-land which they traversed with rapid steps. One hope animated the murderer. Should they reach his victim betimes, his life might yet be spared, and with it the penalty attaching to his own crime.

Ere long they reached the mass of rocks, the scene of the terrible encounter between Lusignan and the Saracen prince. As he neared the spot, the murderer shuddered and stopped short; his trembling limbs refused their support; he could go no further. But Matilda, gazing anxiously about her, caught the gleam of the moonlight upon the arms of her fallen warrior. She rushed forward and threw herself on her knees beside him; she wiped the dust and blood from the idolized face with the folds of her long hair; she laid her trembling hand upon his heart, awaiting with suspended breath for the faintest thrill to bid her hope.

Suddenly there flashed across her being a joy which just touched the extreme of pain.

"Father," she cried, "life yet remains! God has been merciful!"

Then, aroused to the necessity of immediate action, she tore her linen veil in strips to stanch the wounds of her beloved; her strength, the rapidity and skill of her movements, seemed to increase a hundred-fold with the moment's emergency. She raised the head of Malek Adhel, supporting it upon her bosom. Her tears rained down upon his face, as she sought to warm his cold lips with her warm sweet breath. Presently a feeble sigh rewarded her efforts.

"Oh, Heavenly Father," she murmured; "unto Thee, and not unto Thy creature, be his first, his last thought! I ask nothing for myself — all for him!"

Meanwhile the archbishop had busied himself in applying remedies, which he saw would indeed prove but useless. At the foot of the rocks issued a spring of limpid water. The old man carried thither the blood-stained helmet of the fallen warrior, and filled it with the refreshing liquid. Then he returned, and moistened the brow and lips of the dying man.

Matilda was the first to see the effort of the heavy lids to unclose; the movement of the lips, as though they fain would speak.

"Father," she whispered, "draw nearer; speak to him; it is not I whom he now needs."

The archbishop bent over the prostrate form.

"My son," he said, with ineffable tenderness: "God calls you; God awaits you."

The clouded eyes unclosed, the white lips parted with a feeble smile of satisfaction. The watchers bent lower to catch the almost inarticulate words he essayed to utter.

"You have fulfilled your promise, Father; you have come in time to claim my spirit ere its flight into the great Hereafter!"

"Thank God!" murmured Matilda.

"That voice! — Has she come, too? Oh, joy supreme!"

With an effort which exhausted his reviving strength,

he strove to raise himself; but his head fell back helplessly upon the faithful bosom of the young girl.

"My son," said William, "devote to more profitable thought the few precious moments which remain to you. Think of a life of happiness without end!"

"With her, Father?" his hand tightening its clasp upon Matilda's.

William's kind heart had no place for severity at such a moment, and trusting that a God whose chief attribute is love, would not reject a soul gained to Him through its agency, he answered:

"With her, my son, if your heart, like hers, offers unto Him its first fruits of thought and worship."

While he yet spoke the moon's clear beams, piercing a drifting cloud, fell with a holy radiance upon the uplifted face of Malek Adhel. Then solemnly upon the pale forehead the archbishop traced with the emblematic drops the sign of redemption; with words of Divine promise, he held to the pale lips the image of the Crucified.

The dying man's hand relaxed its clasp upon Matilda's fingers and groped about him. The archbishop divining his desire, placed the crucifix in his outstretched palm.

"I love, I believe," said Malek Adhel. His hand sought hers again, still clasping the sacred emblem: "My heart is yours, my beloved, my soul is God's. Farewell, not for eternity, but for a little space!"

Matilda's tears rained down upon him; not such stormy tears as erstwhile she had shed upon his breast

when love was sin, and sacrifice bitterness, but tears sweet and passionless as the summer rain when it comes to fulfil its regenerating mission to fading nature.

Then the archbishop took their clasped hands in his own; tenderly, solemnly he spoke:

"Man and wife I unite you now — for time, for eternity. Malek Adhel, God calls you first; await in Heaven the short period of probation."

A soft flush, a tender light flitted athwart the countenance of him to whom death had opened at once the gates of earthly and of heavenly joy. Then the cheek paled again, the eyes closed, and the great soul of Malek Adhel returned to its God.

Kneeling still, with arms enfolding the inanimate form, Matilda watched with her beloved. She no longer hoped, she no longer prayed. All was over.

Vainly William essayed to speak those words of comfort which had never yet been denied his eloquent lips; only sighs escaped them. He turned aside, to strive alone with a grief which unfitted him for the duty which still remained; for uncomforted himself, he could not offer comfort.

Amid the solemn silence of night and sorrow came the tramp of approaching footsteps. Presently, in the moonlight, William distinguished a detachment of Christian soldiers evidently on their way to the field of battle hard by, to perform the needful offices to the wounded and the dead. He summoned them to his aid. Ten-

derly they lifted the body of the fallen warrior, and laid it upon a litter they had brought with them.

The archbishop and Matilda walked before it; in silence they retraced their steps. Hope had guided them hither; sorrow returned with them.

At the tidings of their approach Richard, at the head of the confederate princes, advanced to meet and do honor to the remains of Malek Adhel. With unfeigned regret they looked upon him who had not only triumphed over their valor, but had won the homage of their admiration. But when they learned from the archbishop that it was not only an heroic foe whom they mourned, but a Christian brother and the husband of the Princess of England, their grief was extreme.

While preparations were being made to render due honor to the remains of the Saracen prince, Richard himself, with a small escort, departed to announce the fatal tidings to Saladin, and to request, in his sister's name, the disposal of the body. On the way the king encountered Kaled, with a party of Mussulmans, whom the sultan had sent in search of his brother.

With a heavy heart Kaled received confirmation of the rumors which had reached them, and to which he had until now refused belief. With Richard he returned to Ascalon, bearing a message from the king to the bereaved brother of Malek Adhel.

For an hour or more these two representatives of two mighty powers were closeted together. When Richard departed, his countenance was not guiltless of evidences of strong emotion.

The great battle of Ascalon had given only victory to the Crusaders, rejoicing had not accompanied it.

The story of the shepherd youth, the agitation of Lusignan's esquire beside the couch of the wounded king, had flown from mouth to mouth until finally it had reached the ears of the leaders of the army. Suspicion was rife and would not be quieted, and that suspicion pointed to him who had most personal interest in the death of the Saracen prince.

Upon his return to the camp these rumors reached Richard. In dismay the English king took the archbishop aside.

"Father," he said, "Lusignan is accused of a foul crime, and yet you are silent. Will not your voice be raised in defence of my friend?"

"Call him no longer your friend," interrupted William; "he is unworthy the name."

"What; you would accuse Lusignan of murder!"

"Malek Adhel died by foul means," replied the prelate solemnly, "and it was Lusignan who directed the assassin's hand."

The king dropped upon a seat, and burying his face in his hands shook as with an ague. Then he suddenly started to his feet.

"And that man who has betrayed honor — his own, and that of the cause he represents — yet lives!"

"He yet lives, to feel with every breath he draws the results of his crime. An object of contempt to man, he would fain hide himself from the eye of his God. Disgrace will be far more insupportable to him than death."

Twelve months had gone by. In the convent of Mount Carmel the sister of Richard daily blessed God that her life had not been ordered according to her own desire.

"What fate would have been mine," she often mused, "if, wedded to Malek Adhel, I had beheld him, yielding to his brother's ascendency, turn back from the true path. Always hesitating between a newly-found faith and a fervent fraternal affection; unworthy Christian or unworthy brother: unable to exercise one virtue without the betrayal of another, what temptations would have assailed my beloved, what sorrows surrounded me! But now, having denied ourselves for righteousness sake the joys of this life, we shall in the Eternal Hereafter rejoice in a happiness not too dearly purchased, though the cost was all that this life held most sweet."

One day from one of the high towers of the monastery, Matilda perceived, far out at sea, a vessel bearing the royal insignia of England; its prow was directed westward — towards her native land. Richard, Berengaria, her kindred, her friends, were returning homeward; and she remained in the Orient, alone, without family, without ties. Her straining eyes watched the departing vessel until the deep red of its flying pennant faded into the dim distance, and its sail appeared like a white speck upon the blueness of the horizon. A sigh of regret — the last — escaped the lips of the young girl.

Then her gaze sought the little churchyard enclosure at her feet; and as it rested upon a tomb around whose pure marble her hand each day entwined a fresh tribute of loving thought, her tears were quenched in a happy smile. For in death they were not parted.

THE END.

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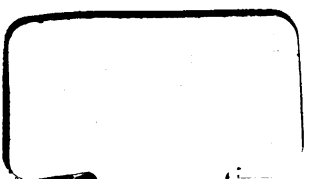
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